COMBAT AIRCRAFT

128

Warren Thompson

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SERIES EDITOR TONY HOLMES

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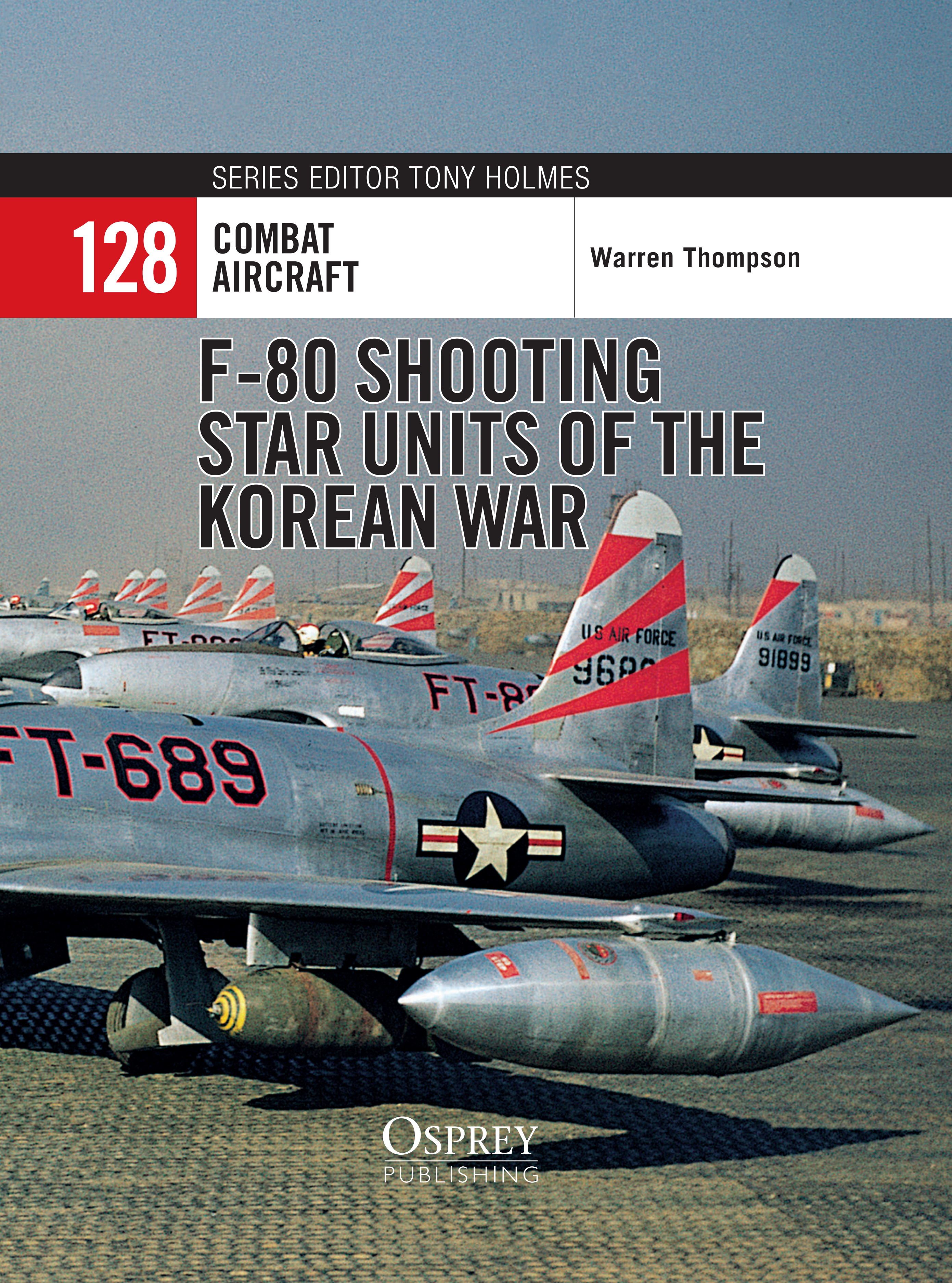
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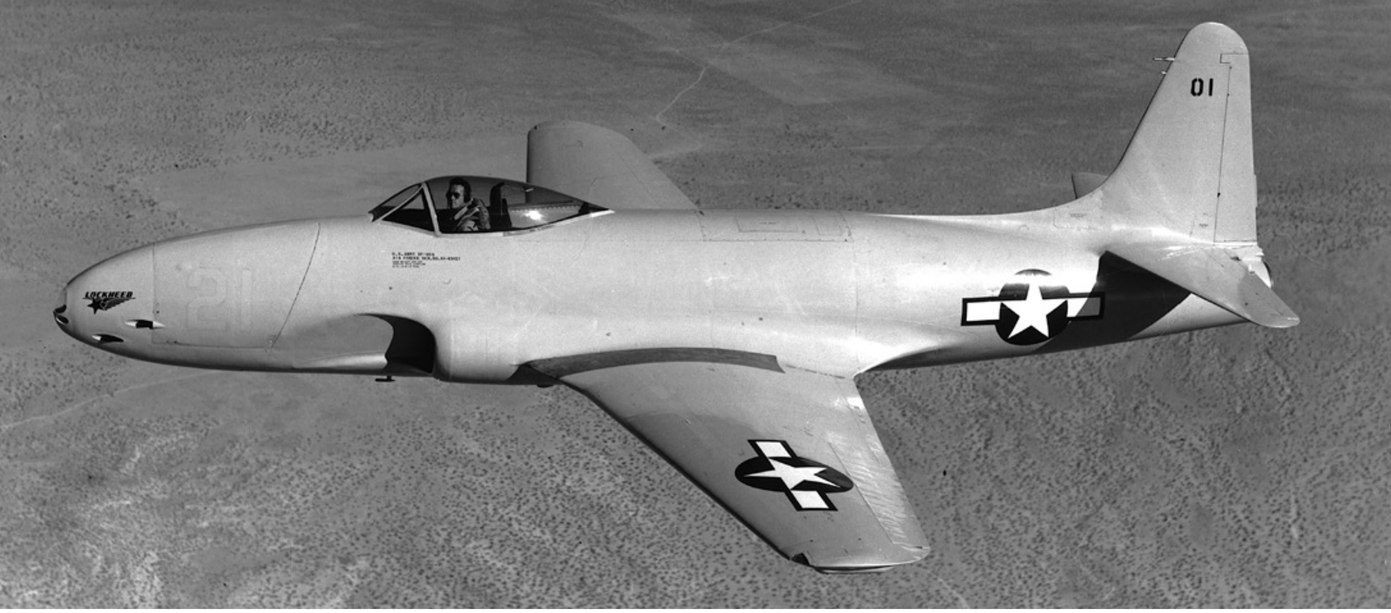


CHAPTER ONE

F-80s IN THE PACIFIC THEATRE

Lockheed Chief Engineer Test Pilot Tony LeVier flies XP-80A 44-83021 over southern California's high desert during a test flight in early 1945. The second prototype of the Lockheed fighter, and the first example powered by the General Electric I-40 turbojet engine (later mass-produced by Allison for the Shooting Star as the J33), this aircraft was nicknamed the 'Gray Ghost' after its 'pearl grey' paint scheme. It suffered a single-stage turbine failure while in a dive at 11,000 ft during a test flight near Muroc Army Air Field (now Edwards AFB) on 20 March 1945, fragments of the engine severing the tail of the XP-80. Lacking an ejection seat, LeVier eventually managed to bail out at 4000 ft. He suffered such serious injuries when he landed that he was kept off flying for six months (*©Lockheed Martin*)

During the final years of World War 2, considerable effort was expended by both the Allies and the Axis powers in the development and production of more advanced weaponry. Two areas in particular would have a lasting impact on the post-war world in the second half of the 20th century – the atomic bomb and jet propulsion. The former would be principally used as a deterrent to keep world peace, while the latter was developed into a viable powerplant that was mass-produced throughout the Cold War.

In the formative years of jet propulsion, countless experimental aircraft designs were created in an attempt to make best use of this potentially awesome power source. Relatively few made it off the drawing board, however, and fewer still reached production. With the Cold War fuelling still more development, those types that did make it into the frontline were almost obsolete before they could achieve operational status.

In the USA, there were two promising entries into the new arena of jet fighters that was rapidly developing towards the end of World War 2 – the Bell P-59 Airacomet and the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star. Bell's entry (first flown in October 1942) was able to attain a top speed of slightly in excess of 400 mph, which actually meant it was slower than the fastest American piston-engined fighters of the time, the North American P-51B Mustang and Chance Vought F4U-1 Corsair. However, the XP-80, first flown in January 1944 following a design and construction period lasting just 143 days (the Lockheed team working on the aircraft was led by talented engineer Clarence 'Kelly' Johnson), broke the 500-mph barrier.

Despite the XP-80 suffering from both technical difficulties and cost overruns, the US Army Air Force (USAAF) saw great potential in the Lockheed fighter. A second prototype, followed by 12 pre-production YP-80s and more than 1700 Shooting Stars, would duly follow. The P-80A became the USAAF's first operational jet fighter when 45 were assigned to the 412th Fighter Group (FG) at Muroc Army Air Field, California, in July 1945.

With military budgets slashed following VJ Day, it was vitally important to the USAAF (soon to become the US Air Force) that its shiny new P-80A 'superfighter' – as the aircraft was dubbed by the American press – remained in the public eye in order to secure funding for sufficient numbers of Shooting Stars to replace the burgeoning ranks of piston-engined fighters then in frontline service. As part of this publicity drive, a P-80A made the first transcontinental jet flight in January 1946, and the P-80B prototype (modified into the one-off XP-80R, which was christened *Racey*) set a world air speed record in June 1947. Service examples were also widely displayed at airshows across the USA, and it was at such an event that future Korean War Shooting Star pilot Jerry Minton – then an impressionable teenager – first saw the Lockheed fighter being put through its paces;

'The Shooting Star was being flown slick, without tip tanks or bomb pylons – it was, after all, a high-altitude interceptor design – and was painted with white enamel [the aircraft Minton had seen was actually a YP-80]. The pilot would make low passes, before pulling up into loops or an Immelmann turn, or climbing almost out of sight while doing a series of aileron rolls. This was very impressive stuff for a young guy who had never flown anything more exotic than a Taylorcraft.'

In 1948, Lockheed switched production to the P-80C, which became the F-80C in June of that year. By then, examples of the Lockheed fighter had completed 18 months of service with the 55th FG in Germany, and the recently created Strategic Air Command had two complete groups equipped with Shooting Stars. Seen as the definitive

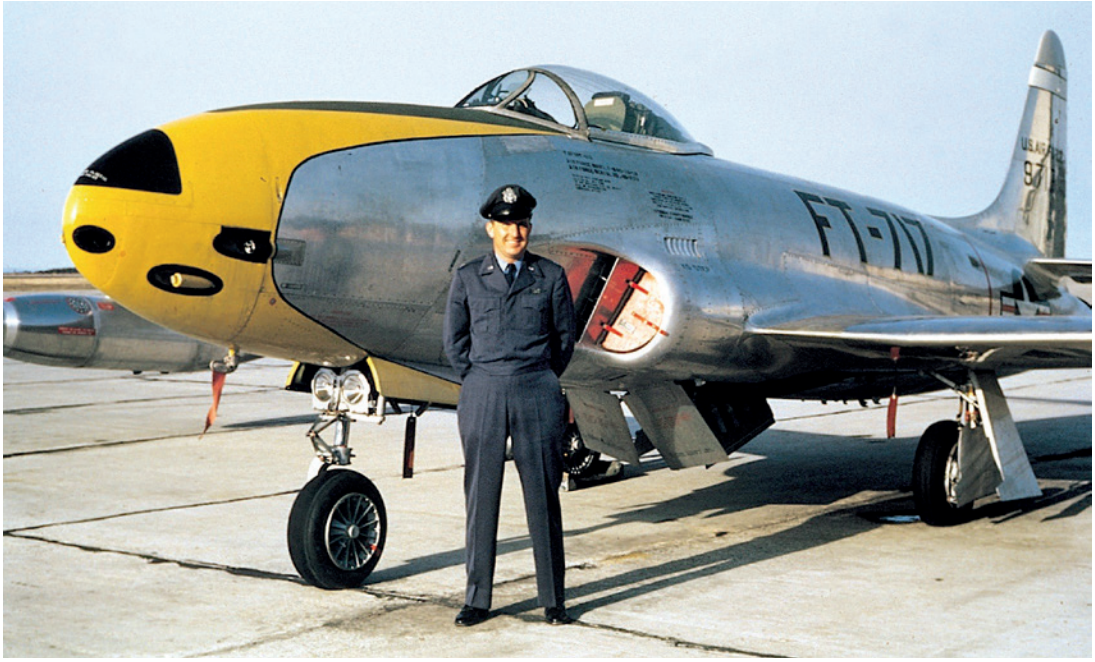
Lockheed Chief Engineer Clarence 'Kelly' Johnson poses with a wooden model of the P-80 for this publicity photograph taken in one of the offices at the company's Burbank, California, plant in 1945. Johnson and his team of 28 engineers – dubbed the Skunk Works because of their autonomy within Lockheed – took just 143 days to design and build the XP-80 in 1943-44 (*©Lockheed Martin*)

P-80As are assembled at Lockheed's Burbank plant right alongside P-38L Lightnings during the spring of 1945. The company built 345 A-model Shooting Stars in 1944-45 before switching to the improved P-80B

model of the first operational US jet fighter, the F-80C was heavier, more powerful and more refined than preceding variants. It would also be the version of the Shooting Star in which units serving within the Far East Air Force (FEAF) would see considerable action during the Korean War.

These groups had initially flown a mix of F-80As and Bs in the FEAF, their introduction signalling the end for most of the F-51Ds of the 18th Fighter Bomber Group (FBG) at Clark Air Base (AB), in the Philippines, with two of its three squadrons receiving Shooting Stars while the third retained Mustangs. The F-51Ds of the Japan-based 8th, 35th and 49th FBGs and the 51st Fighter Interceptor Group (FIG) on Okinawa were also largely replaced by F-80s as the USAF continued its drive towards an all-jet fighter force. Finally, the photo-reconnaissance version of the Shooting Star, the RF-80A, was issued to the FEAF's 8th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) at Yokota AB, the unit coming under the control of the 35th FBG. By the time all four groups had completed their conversion, no fewer than 365 F-80A/B/Cs and 25 RF-80As were in-theatre with the FEAF. On paper, at least, this was an impressive force. However, it did little to deter communist aggression in Korea.

Although military duty in Japan and the Philippines with the Fifth Air Force was considered to be one of the less strenuous postings in the USAF during the immediate post-World War 2 years, FEAF units were nevertheless charged with keeping a close eye on both China and the USSR. With the latter having successfully detonated an atomic bomb in 1949, there was always the possibility that the politically active Cold War could erupt into something much more deadly. The Soviets were well aware of the F-80s' presence in the Far East, but ignorant of the jets' shortcomings – modest range, light armament and limited manoeuvrability, particularly when engaging the piston-engined aircraft of the North Korean People's Air Force (NKPAF) – which would be exposed during the first weeks of the Korean War.

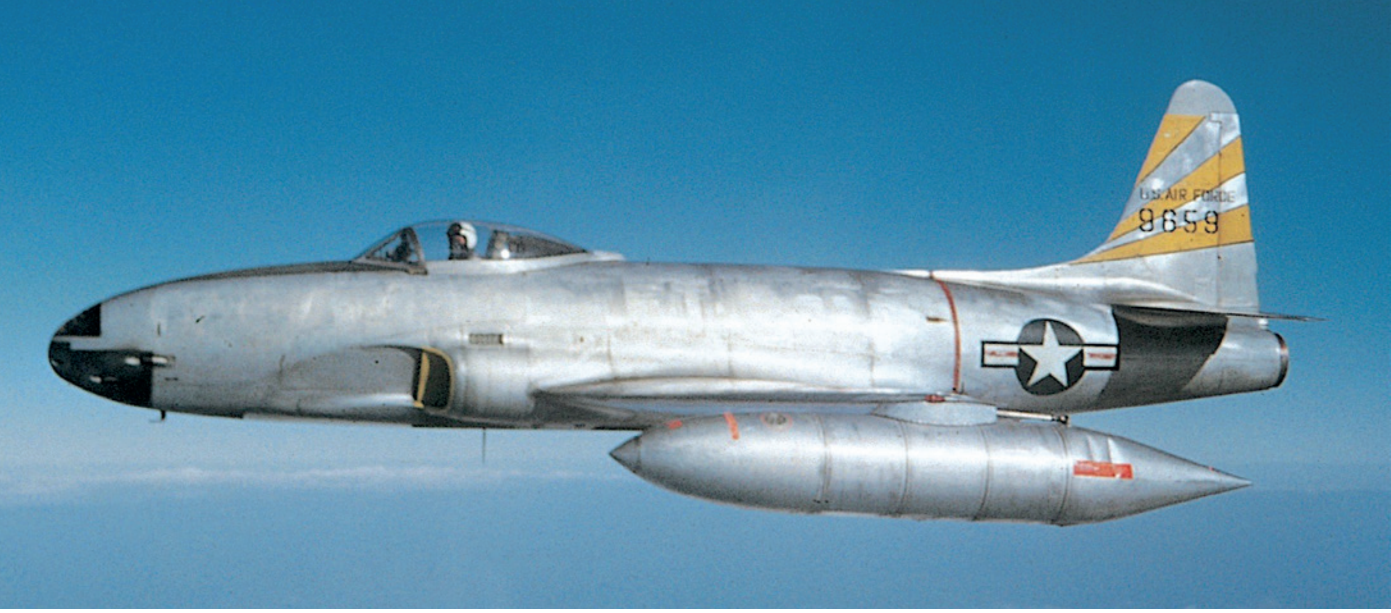


Capt Joe Kepford of the 8th FBS/49th FBG poses by his spotless F-80C (49-717) on a relaxed 'down day' at Misawa AB in May 1950. Typical of the many USAF pilots who made the ultimate sacrifice in this bloody conflict, Capt Kepford was posted Missing In Action on the morning of 7 October 1950. At 0730 hrs, while flying over enemy territory, Kepford radioed his flight leader to tell him that his fighter's aileron boost controls were no longer working. Two minutes later the flight leader observed an explosion on the ground below, which was almost certainly caused by the crash of Kepford's F-80C (49-461). His body was never recovered

The F-80 units' areas of responsibility pre-war were as follows: the 8th FBG (35th, 36th and 80th FBSs) flew from Itazuke AB and covered the southern sectors of Japan; the 49th FBG (7th, 8th and 9th FBSs) was stationed at Misawa AB in northern Japan; and the 35th FBG (39th, 40th and 41st FBSs, and the 8th TRS at Yokota), flying from Johnson AB, protected central Japan and specifically Tokyo. On Okinawa, the 51st FIG controlled the 16th, 25th and 26th FISs, and it would end up furnishing two squadrons to the war effort, while holding the third back for defensive purposes. The 18th FBG in the Philippines would not see action with its F-80s as the group would switch two of its squadrons to F-51s early on in the war, while the third kept its Shooting Stars and remained at Clark AB.

These units would collectively create history during 37 months of conflict in Korea, proving that the F-80 was a very capable fighter-bomber. However, in the spring of 1950, these same aircraft were considered to be the ultimate air superiority fighters in the Far East. At that point, US military intelligence had no knowledge of the existence of the MiG-15, which would have a dramatic impact on air combat in-theatre upon its introduction to the Korean War in late 1950. After only five months of action over North Korea, the F-80 would be rendered obsolete with the appearance of the MiG-15.

In December 1950, USAF high command urgently ordered F-86A Sabres into combat in Korea in a desperate attempt to stem the threat posed by the Soviet jet fighter, relegating the F-80C to the close air support (CAS) and interdiction roles. Little did these top-level decision-makers realise that they had just 'unleashed a tiger' on communist troops in the form of the Shooting Star. Flown by highly motivated and well-trained pilots, Lockheed's 'redundant' fighter would punish the invading forces all the way from the Yalu River down to the Pusan Perimeter.



CHAPTER TWO

FLYING OUT OF JAPAN

Having expended his weapons over the frontline during yet another mission in support of hard pressed UN troops retreating south on the Korean peninsula in August 1950, the pilot of 80th FBS F-80C 49-659 closes up with his flight lead as they head back to Itazuke. The aircraft is equipped with 'Misawa' tip tanks, which had only been cleared for use shortly before this photograph was taken. 49-659 was lost to AAA on 21 August 1951, 1Lt Billy V Dixon being forced to eject over Inchon harbour when the fighter-bomber's right wing caught fire

Within hours of crossing the 38th Parallel into South Korea on 25 June 1950, the mechanised troops of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) had captured more territory than they could have hoped for. Spearheaded by T-34 tanks and supported by Il-10s, La-7s and Yak-9s of the NKPAF, the communist soldiers had encountered practically no resistance. With their conquest of the south nearing completion, few thought that the USA would bother coming to the rescue of the all but defeated Republic of Korea Army (ROKA). This, of course, proved not to be the case. The communist conquest of Korea in the summer of 1950 would eventually fail due to one major stumbling block – the USAF's Fifth Air Force and its F-80s, F-82s and B-26s. However, the NKPA would continue to press south virtually unmolested for the first 48 hours of the war.

During this period, bad weather over most of South Korea made it impossible for the Fifth Air Force to acquire accurate information on just what type of enemy equipment was using the roads and how many troops were involved in the invasion. Unable to stop the communist advance, the American military instead focused its attention on evacuating civilians from the Seoul area. This was accomplished via ship (out of Inchon harbour) or C-54 transport aircraft from Kimpo AB, on the outskirts of Seoul. Although FEAF HQ in Tokyo was willing to do whatever was necessary to help complete the evacuation of US citizens from South Korea, its priority was to stem the enemy's advance. Central to achieving this aim were the FEAF's F-80C groups.

When the invasion was launched, the closest of these units to South Korea was the 8th FBG, which was immediately ordered to provide sufficient fighter cover to ensure that the evacuation of the Seoul area was completed without interference from the NKPAF. On 26 June, most US citizens and certain key South Korean civilians boarded a Norwegian freighter in Inchon harbour and were shipped to safety. The remaining personnel were assembled at Kimpo AB in the early hours of the following morning and flown out on a fleet of USAF C-54s. Covering the operation were F-80Cs from the 35th FBS, whose pilots were forced to fly above thick cloud, which had blanketed the area since the start of the invasion. The operation ran smoothly until midday, when all hell broke loose.

Flying below three layers of cloud (the lowest of which sat at an altitude of about 1000 ft) was a flight of five F-82G Twin Mustangs from the 68th and 339th Fighter All-Weather Squadrons, which intercepted and shot down three Soviet-built aircraft (identified as a Yak-11 and two La-7s). The latter turned out to be part of an advance force leading a larger formation of Il-10 ground attack aircraft that were in turn set upon by the F-80s.

Twenty-four hours prior to this clash over Kimpo, the 8th FBG had given the F-80 its combat debut when the group strafed a NKPA troop convoy, despite persistent poor weather. This mission had immediately revealed that the F-80C had one glaring shortcoming – it lacked the range to loiter on patrol for any useful period of time. 36th FBS pilot 1Lt Robert D McKee encountered this problem during the course of the mission;

'At about 0230 hrs on 26 June I received a telephone call at home ordering me to report to squadron operations at Itazuke. Apparently, there was some kind of emergency developing, and they wouldn't tell me any more until I was on base. When I walked into the briefing room there was a lot of confusion about what was happening in Korea. All I really knew was that I would be leading a flight of two F-80s on an armed reconnaissance mission over the Pusan area. We took off shortly thereafter, and once over Korea I contacted local ground control, who instructed us to remain in our circling orbit overhead until our fuel ran low. We were simply told that South Korea was being attacked from the north, with no further details being provided to us.

'We completed our mission without incident and returned to Itazuke, where confusion still reigned. We refuelled, and I was told that I was to lead a two-ship patrol to Seoul at 0800 hrs. Soon after we had reached the South Korean capital and established our orbit, a ground controller radioed for us to report any military activity that we could see. Moments later I heard another F-80 pilot radio for permission to engage an airborne Yak-9. Things were starting to heat up.

'I spotted a convoy of trucks and tanks trying to cross the Inchon River [from north to south]. I also noted that communist troops were building a pontoon bridge, and that the convoy was at a standstill. This wasn't just any minor troop movement, for the convoy was nearly two miles long! I requested permission to fire on the column, and it took nearly ten minutes to get a response – the modest fuel capacity of the F-80C meant that I could only spend 13 minutes in total over Seoul. I later learned that the delay was caused by the many commands that my strafing request had to pass through for approval. There was a lot of confusion on the ground as to where friendly troops were located. Finally, at the last minute, permission was granted.

'With seconds ticking away, I directed my wingman to strafe the northern end of the convoy from east to west, and I would do the same on the southern end. The purpose of this tactic was to knock out trucks at either end of the convoy, thus restricting the movement of the remaining vehicles. We encountered no AAA throughout the attack, allowing us to take our time and accurately strafe the trucks until we had run out of ammunition. We caused numerous fires and observed a number of explosions during our passes. We also noted heavy troop movements to the north and northeast of the convoy, but we were too low on fuel by then to engage these targets.

'Due to our parlous fuel state, we were given a straight-in approach to Itazuke. We had been among the first to witness the enemy activity on the roads.'

FIRST JET KILLS

On 27 June, as noted earlier in this chapter, the 8th FBG's 35th FBS was credited with claiming the first aerial victories attributed to an American jet. These came just minutes after F-82Gs had downed a trio of NKPAF fighters that had attempted to strafe Kimpo ahead of a formation of Il-10s targeting the C-54s. Enemy fighters had in fact been sighted on several occasions the previous day by F-80 pilots flying top cover over the airfield, although the Shooting Star pilots had obeyed orders and stayed in the vicinity of Kimpo, rather than being lured away by the Yaks.

The flight of four Shooting Stars that recorded the historic claims on the 27th was led by 1Lt Robert E Wayne, and included Capt Raymond E Schillereff, a veteran Ninth Air Force P-51 Mustang pilot from World War 2. Tasked with defending Kimpo that afternoon, 1Lt Wayne provided the following combat account;

'My flight "line-up" was myself as lead, 1Lt Ralph G "Smiley" Hall as No 2, Capt Ray Schillereff as element lead and 1Lt Robert Dewald as No 4. I briefed them that when we arrived in the target area, we would split into elements and set up an orbit between the 38th Parallel to the north and Suwon AB to the south. Under no circumstances were we to cross north of the parallel.

'I wanted to have two aircraft heading north at all times. I don't remember the exact weather conditions, but it couldn't have been too good for we logged 1 hour and 45 minutes of weather on the mission. As I remember, the target area was blanketed in overcast at 12,000 ft, with a lower broken undercast layer at

LIFE
U.S. JET PILOT AFTER SHOOTING DOWN A YAK
JULY 17, 1950 20 CENTS
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The 35th FBS scored four kills in just a matter of minutes on 27 June 1950 whilst defending Kimpo AB, making it the first F-80 squadron to be credited with aerial victories. Amongst the aviators to enjoy success against the NKPAF was Capt Raymond E Schillereff, a veteran Ninth Air Force P-51 Mustang pilot from World War 2. His exploits earned him a place on the cover of *LIFE* magazine's 17 July 1950 edition as the American press tried to put a positive spin on what had been a disastrous three weeks of combat in Korea

5000-6000 ft and good visibility in between. There was a third layer of cloud barely 1000 ft above the ground

'Upon arriving in the target area, we split into elements and started our orbits. We had our power pulled back so we could spend as much time as possible in the target area. On one of our orbits heading north, in the Seoul area, my wingman called out a bogey which I could not pick up. I told Lt Hall to take the lead and attack.

'As we turned to initiate the attack, I picked up seven prop aircraft in loose echelon to the right. Hall couldn't see them, however, so I told him to drop back on my wing. As we approached the echelon, I told Hall to line up on the No 7 aircraft while I lined up on the No 6. I thought that with them flying a loose echelon, all of the enemy pilots would be looking to the left and we might be able to pick them off two at a time. In that way, we might be able to get them all.

'I should mention here that during our intelligence briefing that very morning we had been told that the British had a carrier [HMS *Triumph*] sailing in the Sea of Japan, and that we might see some of their aircraft in the area. Unfortunately, one of the types aboard was the Firefly [assigned to 827 Naval Air Squadron], a single-engined aircraft with a gunner in the rear cockpit. As we closed on the bogies, I saw a single-engined aircraft with a gunner in the rear cockpit. I told Hall to drop back and hold his fire until I had made an identification pass.

'As I approached the No 6 aircraft, I could see the rear gunner firing at me. I told Hall to open fire, but he was too close. I broke left and lined up behind the No 1 machine, and after firing a few rounds he exploded. I then made a tight 360-degree turn to the left and lined up behind No 2, opening fire until this aircraft also blew up. I thought to myself "this is easy – maybe I can get them all". I made another 360-degree turn to the left and rolled out where No 3 should have been, but by then the surviving aircraft had all disappeared into the cloud layer below. I searched the immediate area for a few minutes trying to find the remaining enemy machines, but to no avail.

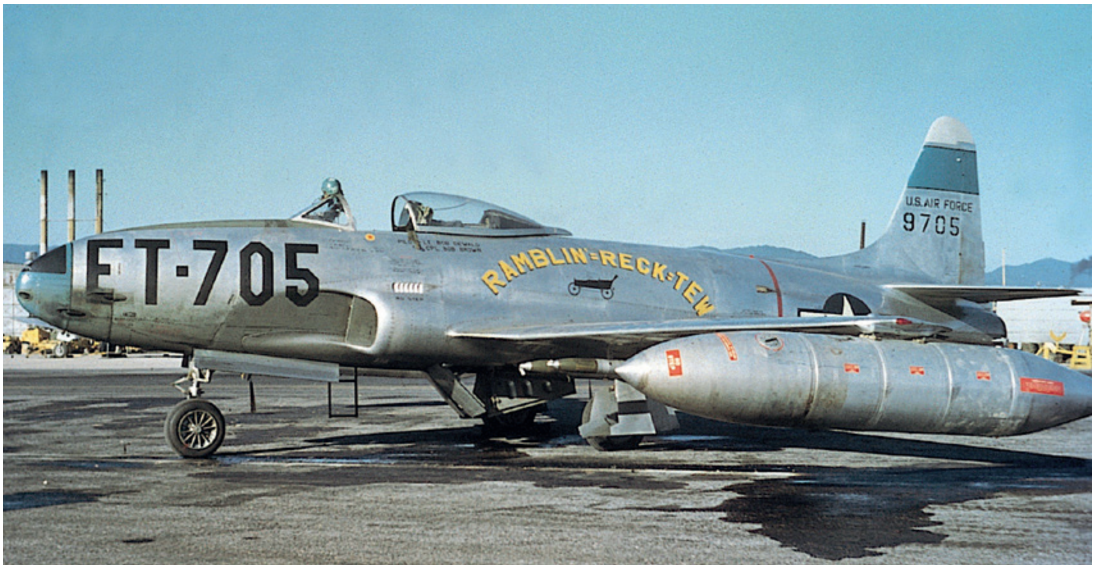
'I then realised that I was below "Bingo" fuel, so I gathered up my wingman and headed back to our base in Japan. In the meantime, the other element in my flight had headed north when the bogies were first sighted, and it too had enjoyed success.'

Both Capt Schillereff and 1Lt Dewald would indeed claim Il-10s destroyed, as the latter explains;

'Having moved away from the other element slightly to the north of Kimpo, I spotted a dark-coloured aircraft flying on a straight course to the south along the Naktong River. Immediately prior to this, I had been listening to all the radio chatter between Bob Wayne and "Smiley" Hall, and visualising the action they were involved in.

'By the time I was able to get Capt Schillereff lined up on my wing [he had not seen the bogey yet], I found myself high above the North Korean Il-10 and heading in the opposite direction.

'I was already practically on my back trying to keep the bogey in sight. Pulling straight through, I was in an almost perfect vertical curve of pursuit. As I rapidly closed on the enemy aircraft, I could tell it was shaped like a fighter, but it had a cockpit that seemed to be long enough to have a



F-80C 49-705 *RAMBLIN'=RECK=TEW* was the personal mount of 1Lt Robert Dewald of the 35th FBS, and on 27 June 1950 he used it to shoot down a NKPAF Il-10 over the Seoul area – a victory symbol has been applied below the canopy rail. Subsequently passed on to the 8th FBS/49th FBG, 49-705 was shot down by AAA during a strafing attack on Pyongyang Sunan AB on 23 March 1951

second crewman behind the pilot. Suddenly, I noticed what seemed like a blinking light in the rear of the cockpit. I realised that there was a gunner firing at me! I was converging fast and was within range, so I got off a long burst, with all six "50s" firing into the North Korean's cockpit area. The enemy pilot took no evasive action, flying straight and level, so I pulled up and began to position myself for another firing pass.

'This time there was no light blinking from the rear gun, so I put another long burst into the fuselage and walked it on up to the engine compartment. Again, there were no apparent results – there was no smoke, the prop was still turning and the aircraft was still in a level, straight flight.

'This called for me to line up for a third pass. I dropped far enough back to allow me to level off and come up behind at point-blank range. There was no curve of pursuit, just a long firing pass. Still no evidence of damage – but I noticed that the fighter had started to descend at a significant angle. This observation was made when I was close in behind the bogey. Just then I found my windscreen covered with engine oil. Glancing off to each side, I saw that the same oil had covered my leading edges and tip tanks. Low on fuel, Schillereff and I climbed for altitude and rode some good tailwinds back to Itazuke.'

1Lts Wayne and Hall beat them back to base, as the former recalls;

'We returned to Itazuke in elements, and, of course, I had to make a victory roll. I told Hall to make one also, since I didn't have enough fuel for two passes [for two kills]. After landing, it was determined that I had fired 328 rounds of 0.50-calibre ammunition, which I think shows the firepower of the six guns in the nose of the F-80.'

Dewald and Schillereff had to wait for their gun camera footage to be assessed before they had their victories confirmed. 'After the film had been viewed, it was determined that both of us had shot down North Korean Il-10 bombers', noted Dewald. 'As far as I was concerned it was a hard-earned victory.'

With the war less than two days old, the 49th FBG was ordered into action. The first of its squadrons to engage the enemy was the 9th FBS, led by the corpulent Maj Charles H 'Squire' Williams (dubbed the largest F-80 pilot in the FEAF). Deployed to Komaki from Misawa on exercise at the time of the invasion, it was immediately ordered to fly to Itazuke to join the 8th FBG – the F-80s flew in on the morning of 27 June. Meanwhile, at Johnson AB, the 35th FBG committed the 39th and 40th FBSs to the crisis.

The 49th FBG quickly enjoyed success over Korea, claiming its first aerial victories on 29 June when 1Lt William T Norris of the 9th FBS downed a La-7. That same day, 1Lt Roy W Marsh of the 80th FBS/8th FBG destroyed an Il-10. Four more Il-10s fell to F-51s on the 29th, although neither the Mustangs nor Shooting Stars could prevent the NKPAF strafers from destroying a C-54 on the ground at Kimpo AB.

Maj Williams had led his unit on the 29 June mission in the defence of Kimpo, as he subsequently recalled;

'I remember that we were ordered aloft by FEAF HQ regardless of the weather or any other phenomenon! We were to fly top cover at Kimpo AB, from where the USAF transports were evacuating the American dependents of the Korean Military Advisory Group. Our mission was to make sure that North Korean aircraft did not interfere with the transports. The weather at Itazuke was lousy (cloud base at about 200 ft and visibility down to three-quarters of a mile), and the forecast was for things to have gotten worse by the time we returned.

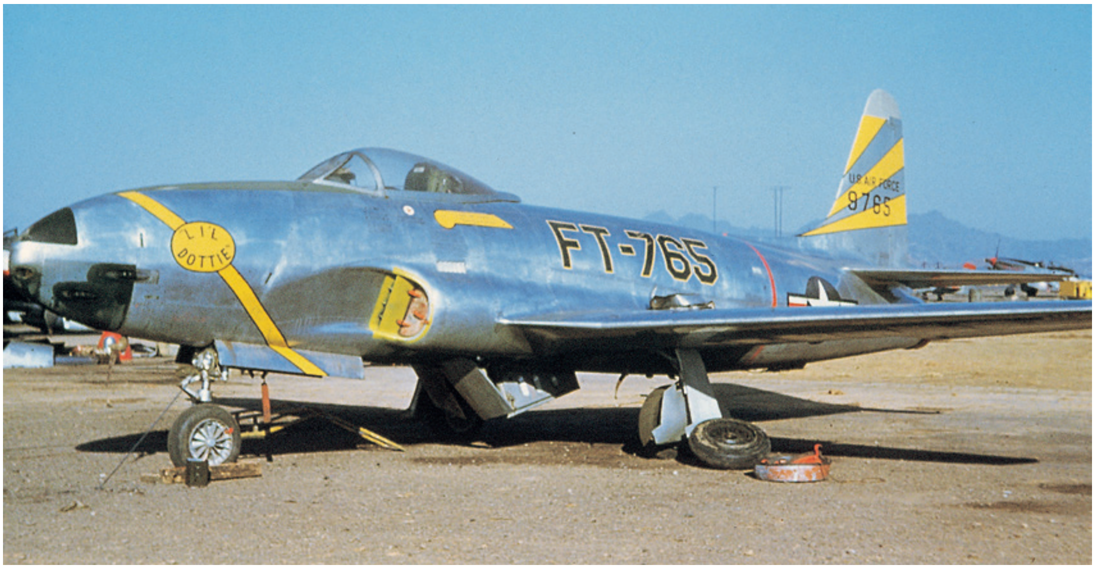
'Several of our high-ranking officers were briefed by Col Jack Price, CO of the 8th FBG, prior to take-off. At this briefing, he told us that this was a top priority mission, and we were to take off even though the weather upon our return to Itazuke or Ashiya was forecast to be "zero-zero". 2Lt "Murky" Holmes, our squadron weather officer and my wingman, confirmed that it would be rough. Col Price stated that if necessary, we'd have to fly out over the bay north of Itazuke and punch out of our birds if we could not land. It sounded like a great operation!

'We took off, and as we approached Kimpo, lo and behold there was a North Korean La-7 cruising along at about 8000 ft heading south straight for the airfield! Our two elements bounced it and got good hits. 1Lt William T Norris came in for a second pass at the fighter, dropped his speed brakes and set the enemy aircraft on fire. The pilot bailed out and landed among some South Koreans, who promptly beat the hell out of him. Happily, the weather prophets were wrong, and we subsequently landed at Itazuke with about 700 ft and one-mile visibility.'

Aptly christened the largest F-80 pilot in the FEAF, Maj Charles H 'Squire' Williams led the first of the 49th FBG's trio of Shooting Star squadrons into action when the 9th FBS attacked enemy troops on 27 June 1950. Seen here with his crew chief, SSgt E R Wilson, in late 1950, by which time he had been promoted to lieutenant colonel, the corpulent Williams was posted to FEAF HQ in Tokyo after completing his tour with the 9th FBS

PILOT
LT COL C H WILLIAMS
&
SGT E R WILSON

The following day it was the turn of the 8th FBG to defend Kimpo, as the NKPA continued to advance on Seoul. 1Lt Charles A Wurster and 2Lt John Thomas (both from the 36th FBS) destroyed two Yak-9s – the first of eight Yaks credited to the F-80C. Shooting Star pilots would down more Yakovlev fighters than any other type. Wurster was flying as wingman to Thomas when they were bounced by two Yak-9s at low level while looking for NKPA targets to strafe



1Lt Roy Marsh of the 80th FBS shot down a NKPAF Il-10 in F-80C 49-765 *"LI'L DOTTIE"* on 29 June 1950, the 'kill' symbol for this victory being visible here below the jet's canopy rail. This photograph was taken at Suwon after the enemy had retreated back north of the 38th Parallel in the early autumn of 1950

near Naktong River. Both pilots were quickly able to turn the tables on their unusually aggressive opponents through the use of superior speed and acceleration.

'We found ourselves in a scrap with two Yak-9s that had seen us first and initiated the attack', Wurster subsequently explained.

'This was to be my first taste of aerial combat, and we definitely had the speed advantage – I am convinced that the North Korean pilots that bounced us failed to understand just how much of an advantage speed gave us. The rounds from their initial firing pass fell way behind our formation, and from then on the Yaks didn't stand a chance.

'I locked onto one of them, and as I quickly closed on my opponent, I gave him a long burst with my 0.50-calibre guns, noting numerous hits – my rate of closure was so fast that I don't know if he even saw me. I let go with a long burst, walking it all over his fuselage, wing roots and vertical stabiliser. Seconds later, the pilot bailed out near Suwon. He pulled his ripcord and the 'chute streamed out of its pack but never opened. For some reason the pilot made no effort to snap the risers to force a bubble of air into the 'chute, so he was either wounded or unconscious.

'It was then that I realised – almost too late – that the other Yak was still in the area [the enemy fighter had manoeuvred onto 1Lt Thomas's tail]. There was no way that a World War 2-vintage prop fighter could outrun us, and the pilot knew it, so he aggressively came after Thomas's F-80. As he pulled in behind the tail of the jet, I told Thomas to break hard, forcing the Yak pilot to overshoot. Within seconds he had turned the tables, getting in behind the North Korean fighter. One long burst disintegrated the remaining Yak-9 and the pilot bailed out. This time, the 'chute opened. Interestingly, the North Korean parachutes were square instead of round.

'In order to verify the kill, 1Lt Thomas safed his guns and made several passes at the descending pilot for confirmation of his victory with his gun camera film. From his reaction to these passes – getting into as small a ball as possible – the pilot must have expected to be gunned while he was still in his harness.

'We later surmised that both of our opponents must have been instructor types, for they were much better pilots than those we had been encountering.'

That same day, the 8th FBG suffered the FEAF's first F-80 combat loss of the war, as 1Lt Wurster recalled;

'While we were working over the marshalling yards at Seoul, squadronmate 1Lt Edwin T Johnson received three direct hits in the nose and canopy from 20 mm AAA. The third round hit the canopy beside his head, and he instinctively moved the stick forward. This change of course was just enough to make him fly through several cables that had been strung out over the yards by the North Koreans. Despite hitting the cables doing 500 mph, Johnson still managed to climb away from the target area and steer a course for home.

'Once safely out of reach of the AAA batteries, he surveyed the damage to his jet. Both tip tanks and the end of each wing had been torn off. Furthermore, both wings had three or four gashes almost all the way through them. Most of his canopy and windscreen were also gone, and the upper half of his rudder and vertical stabiliser had been sliced away, as had half of the left elevator and horizontal stabiliser.

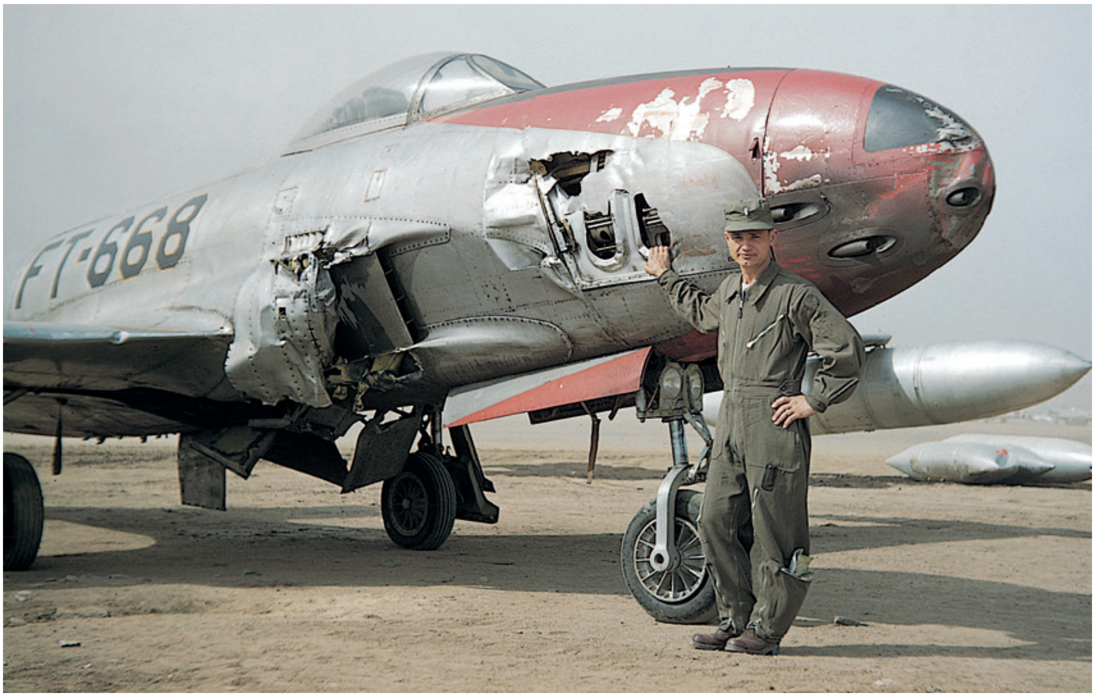
'Johnson climbed up to 13,000 ft, where he had his wingman check over the damage. The latter reported that the entire tail section was waving back and forth as though it was about to fall off! Lacking an operable ejection seat, Johnson decided to bail out, for he was convinced that if the tail did fall off, he probably wouldn't have been able to get out of the tumbling aircraft. He received painful, but not serious, injuries when he struck the right horizontal stabiliser as he fell away from the cockpit. Johnson landed near Suwon, and he was picked up and airlifted back to Itazuke that same afternoon.'

RANGE AND RUNWAY ISSUES

By the end of June 1950 it was glaringly obvious to the FEAF that the F-80 did not possess the range to allow it to carry heavy ordnance over long distances from bases in Japan to the frontline in Korea. Although pilots could fly to and from the battlefield, they could not spend time seeking out targets. When the 'all-jet' force became operational in the Far East, no one had envisaged that it would have to fight such a conflict over great distances just months after the re-equipment had been completed. This problem had to be addressed immediately, and fortunately for the FEAF, the 49th FBG had the answer.

In 1949 the group had won the Far East Gunnery Meet, giving it the opportunity to compete with other USAF units at Nellis AFB. In order to reach the Nevada base, a long overwater flight had to be completed. A plan was duly devised to get the 'short-legged' F-80s all the way across the Pacific to the USA, and one of the pilots who came up with a solution was the 9th FBS's 1Lt Edward R 'Rabbit' Johnston, who recalled;

'1Lt Robert Eckman and I had finished with top honours at the big Far East Gunnery Meet, and we felt that we would have a better chance



Clearly the anonymous second lieutenant posing alongside F-80C 49-668 swore by the old fighter-bomber pilot's adage 'the lower the better' during a strafing run on a target in Korea in the early autumn of 1950. Although the aircraft struck a tree while its pilot avoided AAA, the Shooting Star still made it back to Taegu – home of the 9th FBS/49th FBG. The jet was eventually repaired and returned to flying status with the squadron

of winning at Nellis if we were able to take our own aircraft. The big problem was how to complete the long leg between Shemya Island, off Alaska, to Anchorage. Both of us were squadron maintenance officers, and we suggested that two additional centre sections be added to the current Fletcher wingtip drop tanks. This would boost our fuel capacity by at least 110 gallons of JP-4 in each tank. The fabrication and assembly was very easy, requiring only the extension of the large bolts that held the three sections of the normal tank together. Bob and I enthusiastically put our best crew chiefs to work, and within two days we had a couple of aircraft equipped with our unauthorised modification. We then flew a series of mission profiles to prove beyond a doubt that we had more than doubled the range of the F-80!

'Unfortunately for us, the "brass" at HQ Air Force Materiel Command feared that the heavier tanks would stress the wings, and they told us to shut the project down as it was untested and not worth the risk – it was a miracle we didn't get court-martialled. But in the desperate days of late June 1950, Gen Earle Partridge, Commander of Fifth Air Force, overrode the veto and ordered the big "Misawa" tip tanks to be manufactured as fast as possible so that all of the F-80s committed to the Korean War could use them.

'You had to be very careful when pulling Gs in strafing and dive-bombing runs because of the extra stress put on the entire apparatus, and the wingtip shackles in particular, by the larger tanks. Indeed, the tanks could be pulled off at high Gs when they still had a significant amount of fuel in them. The tanks could then strike the tail section of the jet, causing it to crash [1Lt William T Norris, who claimed a La-7 destroyed on 29 June 1950, and Maj Richard "Ram" McNess, CO of the 36th FBS, were both killed in this way during the early weeks of the war]. More than one pilot got in trouble when a tank failed to feed and he couldn't jettison it. Landing an F-80 with 265 gallons of fuel hanging on one wing was a dicey proposition. As crazy as it may seem, the only way out of this situation was to roll the canopy back, take out your 0.45-calibre pistol and shoot holes in the full tank! This was Gen Partridge's idea, not mine

'The extended range that these tanks gave the F-80 meant that pilots were free to roam the Korean peninsula and perfect the art of ground strafing and bombing.'

Aside from having to cope with the F-80's inadequate range, units were also struggling to find 7000-ft paved runways from which to operate. A fully loaded Shooting Star needed every foot of this in order to build up sufficient speed to take off safely. Only four bases in Japan boasted such runways, and in Korea the situation was even worse – Pusan AB was the sole facility with such a runway, and it was in the process of being 'beaten to death' by the heavy transport traffic rushing troops and equipment into Korea. This meant that Itazuke was the closest base to the frontline, although it too rapidly became overcrowded, forcing the 35th FBG to move its two squadrons from Yokota to Ashiya. The 49th FBG's 8th and 9th FBSs were allowed to remain at Itazuke, however, increasing the number of available F-80 squadrons to seven.

Due to range restrictions, Shooting Star pilots relied exclusively on the aircraft's six 0.50-calibre machine guns when engaging the enemy between 28 June and 6 July. By choosing not to carry external ordnance, units reduced the overall weight of their F-80s, which in turn meant that pilots could eke out a few more precious minutes over the frontline.

A typical mission during this early stage of the war would see a Shooting Star fly 310 miles from Itazuke to the Han River, and back again. Once over enemy territory, pilots found that the roads were packed with enemy troops and vehicles. Rather than rushing in to take their target by surprise, F-80 pilots preferred to orbit the area at 10,000 ft in order to make sure that there were no enemy aircraft lurking nearby. As fuel began to get low, they would dive down and strafe anything that was moving. Using up their ammunition, the pilots would then head south again for Itazuke to refuel.

Fortunately, there were enough F-80s committed to the conflict to allow the FEAF to overfly the constantly changing frontline (in flight strength) every 20 minutes, which meant the pressure was kept on the communists throughout the hours of daylight.

During the second week of July, as the ground attack mission began to assume critical importance for the FEAF's fighter-bomber units, the F-80 groups started to experiment with 5in High-Velocity Aerial Rockets (HVARs) in an attempt to increase the aircraft's weight of fire.

During the summer and early autumn of 1950, Itazuke was almost certainly one of the world's busiest air bases. It was undoubtedly home to more F-80s than any other airfield in the USAF. These red-trimmed machines were assigned to the 25th FIS/51st FIG, and they are seen here being loaded with five-inch HVARs – the principal weapon for Shooting Star units flying from Japan at this time

Much to the pilots' dismay, quite a few of them failed to fire, and this was attributed to the fact that they were World War 2-vintage weapons that had been stored in a warm climate for five years. Furthermore, a number of the rockets had had their fins badly bent out of shape over the years, which meant that they often flew erratically once fired. On the few occasions that they did fly true to aim, the results achieved were impressive – even against Soviet-built tanks. However, the duds would have to be brought back to Itazuke, and the drag associated with them further impacted the F-80's already short range.

Despite enjoying mastery of the skies, the FEAF and the United Nations' air arms in-theatre were struggling to stop the advance of the NKPA. Indeed, by mid-July it had advanced more than 100 miles into South Korea, pushing UN troops into what became known as the Pusan Perimeter as they fought to keep a toehold on Korean soil. The situation was so serious that the 80th FBS was put on 24-hour alert in case its F-80s had to cover an evacuation of South Korea. Fortunately, the NKPAF lacked fighters with the range to attack targets as far south as Pusan, allowing vulnerable light observation aircraft vital to UN artillery free reign over the frontline. When these L-4s and L-17s ranged further north, however, they proved something of a magnet for the NKPAF's Yak-9s.

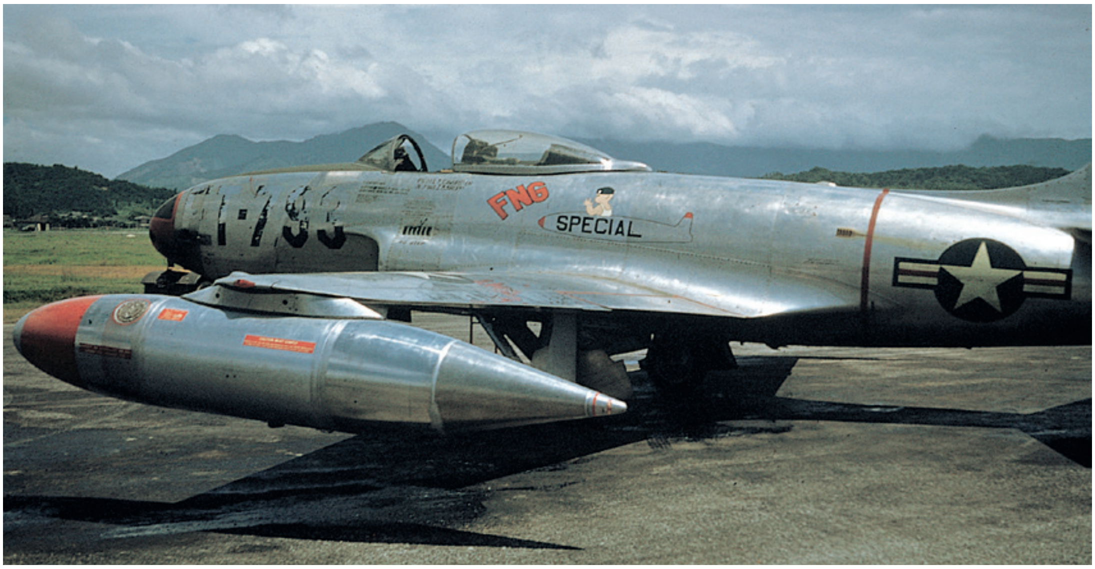
The F-80 pilots did their best to defend the observation aircraft, and Yak-9s fell to 1st Lt Robert A Coffin of the 39th FBS and Capt Francis B Clark of the 36th FBS on 15 and 17 July, respectively.

F-51s FOR F-80s

In mid-July, the American presence in the air over Korea took a dramatic turn with the arrival in Japan of the aircraft carrier USS *Boxer* (CV-21). On board the vessel were 134 F-51D Mustangs hastily pulled from various Reserve and Air National Guard units in the USA (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 113 – F-51 Mustang Units of the Korea War* for further details). The fuel-hungry F-80s would be affected most by this sudden increase in the number of F-51s in-theatre, for although the Shooting Star had proven itself to be an excellent, stable gunnery platform, the aircraft was simply too short-legged and too fast for effective use in the ground attack role.

Changes commenced immediately, for on 10 July the 35th FBG's 40th FBS exchanged its Shooting Stars for Mustangs. Days later the 18th FBG (at Clark AB) left its F-80s behind and moved to Korea to fly F-51s. The 8th FBG would also see two of its units – the 35th and 36th FBSs – briefly revert to piston power, although not before they had flown their F-80s on numerous missions deep into North Korea (they would switch back to Shooting Stars in December 1950). One such mission, undertaken on 19 July, all but finished off the NKPAF.

On this day an RF-80 had performed an early-morning photo-run over the main communist airfield at Pyongyang. Once back in Japan, its processed film revealed at least 25 aircraft dispersed among trees on the edge of the field. A strike was immediately ordered, and within an hour the 8th FBG had launched seven F-80s from Itazuke to bomb the base. The attacking pilots found the aircraft still hidden amongst the trees, and they immediately commenced a series of deadly low-level strafing



1Lt Charlie Wurster's F-80C 49-793 *FNG SPECIAL* (a derogatory term given to military personnel that are new to combat) is seen at Itazuke AB during the early weeks of the war. He was flying this 36th FBS aircraft when he shot down a Yak-9 on 19 July 1950 – this was Wurster's second aerial victory, as he had also destroyed a Yak-9 on 30 June. Having survived subsequent spells in the frontline with the 8th FBS/49th FBG and the 16th FIS/51st FIG, 49-793 was eventually sold to the Chilean air force in July 1958

passes. No fewer than 14 Yak fighters and Il-10s were destroyed, with the remaining aircraft being badly damaged.

Three more Yak-9s were shot down by the 8th FBG that same day, these aircraft falling to 36th FBS pilots 1Lts Robert D McKee and Charles A Wurster (his second Yak fighter of the conflict) and 2Lt Elwood A Kees. Wurster was flying in the No 3 position in a flight of four F-80s 20 miles northeast of Taejon AB when they were informed by radio that four 'Yak types' were strafing and bombing the base. Within seconds the flight lead and his No 2 were headed directly for Taejon, while Wurster and his wingman climbed in order to provide cover from above and behind. Wurster subsequently recalled;

'At approximately 12,000 ft No 2 man spotted four Yak-9s in formation headed north at about 6000 ft. Lead still did not see the bogies, so No 2 man took the No 1 slot. We remained about 2000 ft behind and 1000 ft above them. As we got in behind them and were discovered, two Yaks on our left made a sharp turn to the left and down. The two on the right turned right and up.

'At this time I noticed my lead pull straight up. Our No 2 man hit the enemy element that had turned left and down. My element went after the other two Yaks. I used my gyro gunsight and closed in on the lead ship and started to fire at 15-20° off, slightly above him and at a range of 1000 ft. My hits were clustered around the engine, cockpit and left wing root. Suddenly, there was a fair sized explosion around the wing root and he began trailing a white-grey smoke caused by a small fire on the underside of the wing. I broke off the attack by breaking high left and trying to spot the Nos 1 and 2 men of our flight who had taken on the other enemy element. At this point I jettisoned my rockets and tip tanks.

'Completing a quick 360° turn, I came in on another Yak-9. As I opened fire from zero angle-off and approximately 900 ft, I observed hits on both wing roots and in the rear of the cockpit. At that same instant, I noticed tracers zipping between the target and myself. I broke hard left and high. During this second encounter, I was keeping a wary eye on the first Yak, who was in a steep smoking dive, straight ahead. In seconds he had crashed into a hillside.

'I then flew up to the enemy aircraft that had fired at me and formated with it on his left wing. I was slightly back and about 200 ft out. He was in a slight turn to the right, and the pilot was looking over his right shoulder. He appeared to be wearing a dark brown leather helmet with no goggles. He turned his head toward me and sat up straight as though startled, but took no evasive action. As I was beginning to overrun the enemy aircraft, I made a hard break right and passed about 50 ft over the top of him and headed toward Taejon, where our No 1 man was having some difficulty. Later, our No 2 man said he saw the pilot bail out of the first Yak-9 that I had scored some hits on at a very low altitude.

'Generally, I would say that these four Yak-9s were flown by inexperienced pilots. Their evasive action was nil, and they were never aggressive in any of their attacks.'

Two more Yak-9s fell to Capt Robert L Lee and 2Lt David H Goodenough from the 35th FBS on 20 July, and these proved to be the final aerial victories for 105 days. Lee provided the following account of the engagement;

'We were on a mission about ten miles north of Taejon. 1Lt Bob Meade and I were flying together when we thought we saw aircraft below us that we could not readily identify. We were about to dive down on them when two Yaks bounced us from above and behind. I pulled up and Meade dove down. As I looked around, Meade had one on his tail, so I rolled over onto him. Meade increased his speed and pulled away, at which point the Yak broke off the pursuit. By then I was locked on him, and as he turned I fired a long burst that caused the fighter to come apart as it rolled over onto its back and went straight in.'

2Lt Goodenough watched both Capt Lee shoot down the Yak and the second enemy fighter break away to the right after bouncing the F-80s. 'Capt Clark and I went after it, and as he fired, the enemy pilot pulled up', Goodenough noted post-mission. 'I fired several rounds into the underside of the Yak, and for a few seconds it continued to climb before bursting into flames and spinning down towards the ground. Seconds later I saw the pilot bail out, so he survived.'

There was no fighter combat at all in August, principally because USAF B-26s and B-29s spent much of the month expressly targeting known airfields in North Korea. This offensive spelled the end for the NKPAF, with the majority of its airworthy aircraft being flown en masse across the border into Manchuria, where they were scattered over several airfields.

Now fitted with new 'Misawa' tip tanks, F-80s roaming further afield in North Korea still occasionally came across communist aircraft hiding at the few battered airfields that remained operational along the Yalu River. Usually flown in at dusk, these NKPAF fighters and bombers were located at first light by RF-80s conducting their daily photo-runs. A strike mission would be immediately generated, resulting in the fighter-bombers heading north on yet another 'hunting trip' – records show that approximately 24 aircraft were destroyed on the ground by F-80s in the three-month period from July to the end of September 1950. Such missions did little to halt the advances being made by the NKPA on the ground, however.

At this stage of the conflict, F-80 pilots typically flew one of four types of mission, as 2Lt George R 'Bob' Veazey of the 36th FBS explains;

'The usual mission was "pre-briefed", with a flight of four briefed to attack a specific target. A second type was a "JOC" [Joint Operations Command] mission, usually flown by a flight of four who had been on alert. They would be sent to attack a target called in by a frontline observer or a reconnaissance aircraft. A third type was a pre-briefed mission flown in squadron strength (12 aircraft) or, on rare occasions, group strength (48 aircraft). The fourth type was a "late light recce", where the flight of four would take off just before dusk and bomb a road with a partial load to make a cut, then fly north for 15 minutes or so before returning to bomb and strafe trucks that were backed up at the freshly made road cut.

'A very experienced pilot – an "old head" – usually flew lead on the four-ship missions, and after each and every sortie there was a debriefing of each flight member by Intelligence personnel.'

Myriad tactics were employed to blunt the NKPA's crucial supply routes from China in the north to the frontline troops fighting in central and southern Korea. One of the lesser-known techniques was skip-bombing, which 36th FBS pilot 1Lt Gene Crackel used with unknown results;

'Intelligence reported that a train had pulled into a railroad tunnel, so two flights of F-80s were despatched to destroy it. We circled over the target area, with each pilot taking it in turns to break away and make a low-level skip-bombing run against the hidden locomotive. The bombs were fitted with delayed-action fuses so that we wouldn't blow ourselves up when they hit the ground.

'I recall seeing several pilots make their runs, causing puffs of dust to kick up as the bombs skipped across the ground at the mouth of the tunnel. They all missed. When I made my run, I discovered it wasn't easy. The valley was narrower and more crooked than it appeared from above – I had to zig and zag at about 400 mph. I released my two bombs and they were never heard from again! No one saw them hit outside the tunnel, so they must have gone in. But, there was no evidence of any explosions – no dust and no debris coming from either end of the tunnel. We never knew what happened, but if they had exploded, I think it would have collapsed the tunnel and destroyed the train!'

Throughout the summer months, literally every military aircraft that could be sent aloft sortied from increasingly overcrowded bases in Japan to support the outnumbered UN troops who were steadily retreating south on the Korean peninsula. 35th FBS pilot 1Lt Robert Anderson recalls one of the missions he flew from Itazuke in late July;

'Much was made of the fact that we were going to war like commuters, leaving our families in the morning, flying into big trouble in Korea, and – if we were lucky – being home for dinner at night. The USAF even posed a picture of a wife and children waving so-long to one of our pilots as he taxied out. That was mostly bunk, because our dependents were getting ready to go home and we were getting ready to move to forward bases in Korea.

'I was in a four-ship flight of F-80s carrying 500-lb bombs sent to look for North Korean tanks about 50 miles north of Taegu. Most of us would have given anything to be closer to the war and to be spared some very rough navigating, with clouds and rain squalls on part of the hour-long trip to Korea.

'On this mission, our No 4 pilot reported that his tanks wouldn't feed. The F-80 relied on a single feed point to handle the fuel from both the wingtip and main tanks, and if it didn't work, it didn't work. There were rumours that at least one guy in the squadron was *never* going to get his tanks to feed as long as he faced the prospect of getting shot at. But on this particular day, we had a genuine "abort" because of this problem, so we took just three F-80s up along the Naktong River and sought in vain to get in contact with a ground controller who was supposed to know about us. In haste, I had borrowed another guy's helmet and was suffering a terrible "skull burn" from the poor fit, which gave me a splitting headache throughout the mission.

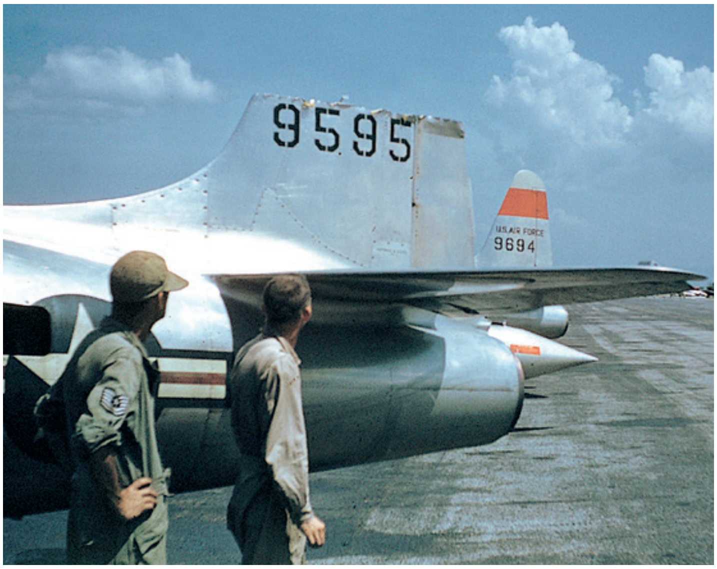
'We had a communications glitch that kept us from linking up with a controller, and we never did find any of those all-important T-34 tanks. But our flight leader spotted some North Korean troops and light vehicles and we rolled in on them. We could see muzzle flashes. Apparently, there were some larger guns we couldn't see, because shells that seemed to be aimed at us were exploding on a hillside to our left as we began our dive-bombing attack.

'The F-80 was an extremely stable platform for gunnery and bombing. But we also knew that we couldn't "jink" or take evasive action if we wanted to have much prospect of hitting the enemy. Our flight leader dropped his bombs right smack into the midst of those North Koreans, who were scrambling all over the place, but his wingman had two problems strike him at once. First, some small-calibre stuff damaged his hydraulics. Then his bombs refused to release. He was able to hose off some bursts with his 0.50-cals, but couldn't get rid of the bombs until he went out to sea and shook them off. We were left with 50 per cent of our original strike force.

'I was never quite so worried about the enemy gunfire as I was by the terrain. Korea had numerous mountains and valleys, with jagged ridge lines and terraced hills. I lined up on a group of communist soldiers who were running like hell across a paddy field away from a Jeep-like vehicle they'd abandoned. I'm pretty sure one of my bombs fell on the troops, the other on the vehicle. Then I looked at my fuel gauge and it scared the hell out of me.

'At this point in the war, our F-80s were not yet equipped with the "stretched" wingtip tanks. On some later missions, we also carried two additional tanks on mid-wing hardpoints. In August 1950, however, every drop of gas counted, yet my flight leader was saying, "Hey, there's some more of them beyond that hillock off to the right!" He and I broke a rule. We made another pass when the fuel situation told us we shouldn't. We were lucky. We got back to Japan and landed on fumes. The happiest moment of my life was when I pulled that painful helmet off my head. Only then, while alighting to the ground, did I look at the tail of my F-80. A large-calibre shell had punched a hole about a foot in diameter clean through it, the round narrowly missing the rudder cables. I walked around behind my F-80, bent down on my knees and had to fight the urge to vomit.'

Although ground fire consistently posed the greatest threat to F-80s



1Lt Charles Wurster and his crew chief take a look at what remains of his F-80C's vertical stabiliser at Itazuke immediately post-mission. During the course of a low-level CAS sortie over the frontline Wurster's jet had hit a cable that had been strung across a valley. Despite the aircraft losing the top 3.5 ft of its tail, the pilot managed to land back at Itazuke without any major problems. 49-595 was quickly repaired and returned to service with the 36th FBS/8th FBG

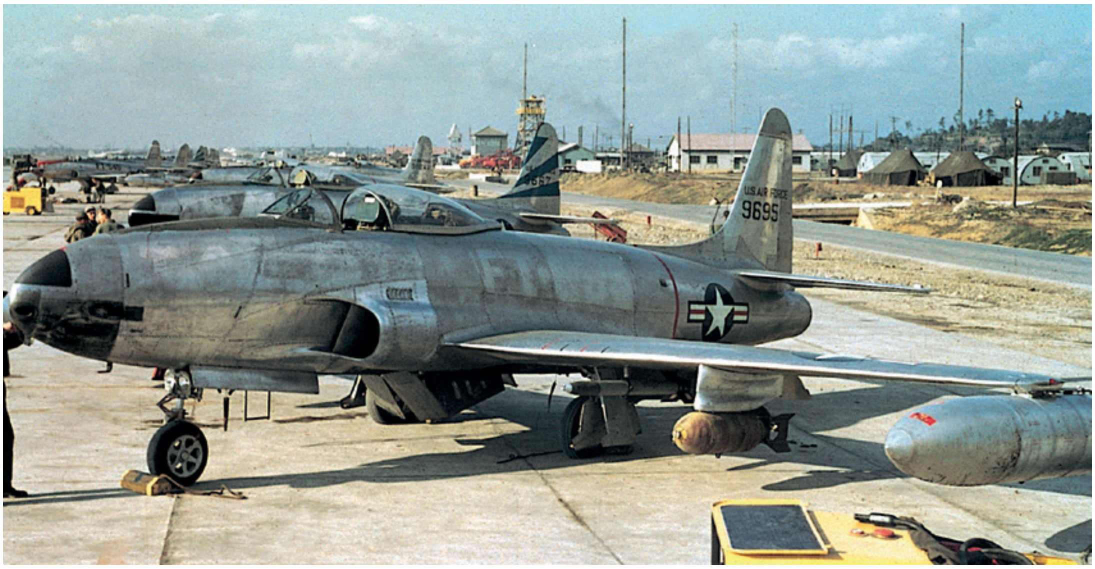
throughout the conflict, the communists also devised other ways to bring down low-flying aircraft. As 1Lt Robert Anderson mentioned earlier, much of North Korea is covered in mountainous terrain, criss-crossed with valleys. The NKPA took advantage of this by constructing rail and road networks through the valleys between the mountain ranges, and these proved to be irresistible targets for F-80 pilots. However, attacking trucks and trains in these areas was a risky business, particularly once the NKPA began surrounding the routes with gun emplacements.

The communists also quickly adopted the practice of stringing cables across the valleys to catch unsuspecting fighter-bomber pilots. Indeed, one of the first aircraft lost during the war was an F-82 Twin Mustang that flew into one of these cables – a number of night-marauding B-26s were also downed this way. Here, double Yak-9 killer 1Lt Charles Wurster of the 36th FBS relates an experience he had with a cable on a low-level mission during the late summer of 1950;

'I was stacked up on my element leader, Lt Ellis, on a low-level CAS sortie over the frontlines. I was busy watching Ellis's jet – when low-level flying, the wingman was "stacked up" so the leader was only concerned with not hitting the ground. When flying close formation, the wingman was closely watching the element leader, rather than what was in front of him. Literally skimming the surface, I only spotted out of the corner of my eye at the very last minute what looked like a black and white line directly in my path. I pushed the stick forward and heard a loud bang. Glancing up into my rear-view mirror, I couldn't see anything – my vertical stabiliser was gone. It had sliced off the top 3.5 ft of my tail. I knew I had hit a cable, and my immediate reaction was to pull up and head south.

'I struggled up to 30,000 ft, attempting to make radio contact with Ellis while gaining height. My radio antenna had also been sheared off, however, so naturally there was no response to my calls. When I got to the coast above the Pusan Perimeter, I had to make a decision whether to try to land there, or fly back across the Sea of Japan to Itazuke. With my aircraft still handling okay, I chose to return home, landing back at base without any great problems. Needless to say, I created a lot of attention when I touched down with much of my vertical tail missing. Had I been flying a few feet higher, or in a slight bank, when I made contact with the cable, it could have been disastrous.'

35th FBS CO Maj Vincent C Cardarella was not so fortunate on 1 August 1950, however, when his F-80 flew into a cable strung between mountains on the Chochiwon-Chonan road. He was killed in the resulting crash.



F-80s sit armed and ready for their next mission from Itazuke AB in defence of the Pusan Perimeter in early September 1950. The aircraft in the foreground are from the 35th FBS/8th FBG, while the Shooting Stars parked in the distance to the left in this shot belong to the 9th FBS/49th FBG. 49-695, devoid of the 35th FBS's recently introduced sunburst marking on its tail, was an early attrition replacement supplied to the FEAF from a unit in the USA

Ten days later, both the 35th and 36th FBSs gave up their Shooting Stars for Mustangs, while the 80th FBS retained its jets. The now surplus F-80s did not sit idle for long, being absorbed by the 49th FBG. These equipment changes were made solely because the F-51s could operate from numerous Korean bases that were simply too austere for the F-80s. Closeness to the frontline also meant that Mustang pilots could loiter for an hour or more over targets deep in North Korea – Shooting Star pilots barely managed 15 minutes overhead before having to return to Japan. Once they had completed their mission, aviators flying veteran F-51s could fly back to their bases, refuel and rearm and then sortie on a second or third mission all in the same day.

Eventually, F-80 units would also be able to mirror this performance following the establishment of hastily built bases in Korea, although for the time being the ratio of piston-engined fighters to jets had significantly changed within the FEAF following the arrival of the Mustang.

Capt Russell E Taliaferro was one of the pilots from the 49th FBG to fly an ex-8th FBG jet into combat following the group's staggered move from Misawa AB to Itazuke on 14 August – his 7th FBS was the last of the 8th's three F-80 units to head into action. The squadron was well stocked with aircraft at this point in the war, sending no fewer than 33 F-80s to Itazuke to replace the 9th FBS, which headed back to Misawa. Before the sun had set on its first full day in the frontline, the 7th FBS had logged 37 sorties. Taliaferro was amongst the pilots to make his combat debut on this date;

'I was part of a flight tasked with hitting enemy positions north of the bomb line. We met several targets along the way and shot up a group of enemy soldiers. Although our strafing passes were not particularly significant, we nevertheless felt that we had made a contribution to the war effort. Unfortunately, our armament was pretty light – six 0.50-calibre guns and 12 five-inch HVARs fired from underwing mounts. These rockets were unguided and were not precision weapons, being more like shooting a shotgun when it came to accuracy.

'Our six 0.50-calibre guns were quite effective against personnel, vehicles, trains, fuel storage areas and cavalry (we saw them, and hit them hard), but they were useless against Russian-built T-34 tanks. For a long time we were unable to get the best ammunition for our 0.50s, which was a mixture of ball, incendiary, tracer and armour-piercing.'

The 7th FBS had arrived in the frontline just as the Pusan Perimeter was feeling the squeeze of an all-out NKPA attack to rid Korea of UN troops once and for all. This meant that there was no shortage of targets to hit, and on 14 August alone, the unit expended 27,000 rounds of ammunition and 43 rockets – no bombs could be carried due to the distance that separated Itazuke from the target area. The official records for the 7th FBS show that the unit just about duplicated these figures on its second day of combat.

Capt John Salyards of the 7th FBS would eventually complete 126 missions in the F-80 in 1950-51, with some of his most gruelling sorties being flown in the first few days of his tour with the 49th FBG. He related his experiences to the US military's independent newspaper, *Stars & Stripes*, while still in-theatre;

'I've had the tar scared out of me on a couple of missions. About a month ago on a pre-dawn raid on Sinuiju airfield, I came across the field with my flight and they put up so much flak that we had to fly at just five feet off the deck in order to go under it. My F-80 did not suffer a single bullet hole as a result, but I was scared all the way across the target area while firing at the AAA positions.

'There was another time at Yongdok while we were strafing troops that some character lobbed a 20 mm round up my tail pipe and set my F-80 on fire. I chopped the engine to put out the fire, then restarted it. We erased more than 200 enemy troops on that occasion. A day or two later, we were working 35 minutes north of Taegu when we stumbled on an enemy armoured column, which we lined up and strafed. Our formation netted three tanks and 17 vehicles on that mission.

'I can remember one more mission, in the early days of the war, when I led my flight of four F-80s into a tangle with a 14-car troop train that was loaded to the gills. We started off hitting the cars with rockets and our 0.50-calibre ammo. We saved the engine until all the cars had been hit so it could not stop and allow the troops to take cover. We destroyed all the cars and the engine.

'Our orders at the time were to shoot up anything that looked suspicious, as the enemy would hide

A veritable production line was established at Itazuke in the summer of 1950 building up five-inch rockets for use against the NKPA in Korea. The key weapon in the F-80's arsenal during the opening phase of the campaign due to the aircraft's poor range, the HVARs were built by Japanese labourers overseen by USAF armourers. Here, packing crates used to transport rocket bodies, guidance fins and warheads have been pressed into service as tables for the weapons' outdoor assembly in July 1950

ammunition and fuel dumps pretty much anywhere – in schoolhouses and hospitals and, lately, haystacks. Drilling the latter with 0.50-calibre fire caused them to ignite and blow up. On one mission we spotted 12 haystacks, and I lined them up and fired. They all immediately blew up!

'On some sorties at low altitude, we observed long lines of civilians walking down roads toward UN areas. Obviously, they were fleeing from the communists and were dressed in the traditional white garments worn by peasants in Korea. But time after time, as we flew over them, our aircraft would be targeted by machine gun fire. UN forces had slow-flying planes equipped with loud speakers to warn the civilians to stay 50 miles away from the frontlines. Pamphlets and agents also made it clear that the UN knew that the communists were camouflaging themselves to look like peasants on the march, and that large groups would be fired on.

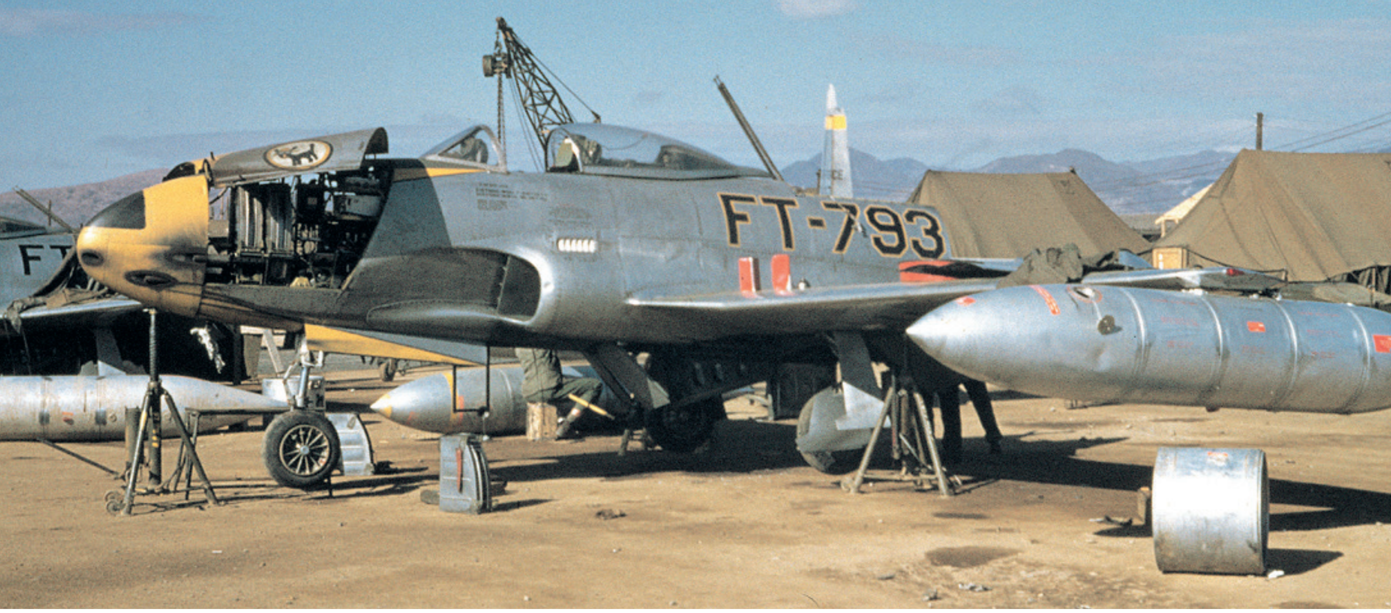
'Intelligence reports informed us that men pushing wheelbarrows and woman with bundles on their back were carrying guns and ammunition for the enemy. Our orders were to fire if they were within the 50-mile limit. On many missions when we came across a large group of people, we fired on them and the wheelbarrows and bundles exploded.

'Regardless of what some nay-sayers state, the F-80 Shooting Star is the best ground support plane made. It can take several hits and still fly, and I've seen four feet shot off the wing of one and the pilot still made it back to base. It can also sneak up on the enemy and clobber them before they can see or hear you. I flew on the first missions undertaken by the 49th, and the pilots did not change their uniforms for eight days because they were flying three missions a day.'

Despite being unable to carry bombs during these early operations, the F-80s nevertheless caused considerable damage within the enemy strongholds at Kumchon, Taejon, Taegu, Sinju and Pyongyang. As impressive as the efforts of the fighter-bombers were during August, these missions failed to slow the enemy's advance into South Korea. Supplies continued to head southward during daylight hours, thus proving that the NKPA could easily make good the losses it had suffered at the hands of UN air power. Only when these losses became more difficult to sustain would the communists resort to the nocturnal movement of supplies – and this would occur only after the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA) had entered the war.

The casualties inflicted by aircraft (including the F-80) on communist troops during the early months of the conflict were truly staggering. This was principally because the NKPA had failed to impress upon its personnel the deadly effectiveness of air power when used correctly during preparations for the invasion of South Korea.

The FEAF was the only air arm of note in the region, and perhaps senior officers in the NKPA had hoped that the US military would not intervene in the conflict. Whatever the case, American pilots noted that on low-level strafing runs, enemy troops would stand up in trucks and fire their rifles at the oncoming fighter-bombers. Seconds later, they were engulfed in a massive explosion or a fiery shroud of napalm. This cost the North Koreans the lives of thousands of valuable troops, but even with this fatal flaw in its tactics, the NKPA kept pushing south completely unchecked.



8th FBS F-80C 49-793 undergoes a 100-hour inspection in the open at Kimpo in the early winter of 1950 – temperatures had already dropped below freezing at night when this shot was taken. The fighter-bomber's J33-A-35 turbojet engine has been completely removed and taken away for closer examination undercover. A photograph of this aircraft in the markings of the 36th FBS/8th FBG can be found on page 21

CHAPTER THREE

FLYING FROM SOUTH KOREA

On 15 September 1950, in an attempt to relieve the unrelenting pressure on the Pusan Perimeter, Operation *Chromite* was launched. The largest sea-to-land assault since D-Day, it saw 75,000 US Army and US Marine Corps troops come ashore at Inchon, near the South Korea capital, Seoul, from a naval task force numbering 261 vessels. Within days the soldiers had cut off the NKPA's supply routes and recaptured Seoul. Simultaneously, the Eighth Army broke out of the Pusan Perimeter and started pushing the NKPA back north. The communist troops in turn fought a bitter rearguard action as they withdrew towards and then beyond the 38th Parallel.

One of the key targets for the troops coming ashore at Inchon was Kimpo AB, directly west of Seoul. The largest and most important airfield in Korea, it was singled out for capture by Commander-in-Chief of the UN Command, Gen Douglas MacArthur, when he helped devise *Chromite*. It fell without a fight on 17 September, and this allowed Fifth Air Force to bring in aircraft from Japan to support the drive into North Korea.

As noted in the previous chapter, in the weeks leading up to the Inchon invasion, the FEAF had drastically altered its force makeup in respect to its key fighter-bomber type in-theatre. The influx of F-51s from the USA had left just four F-80-equipped squadrons directly committed to the war. The FEAF now realised that it was short of Shooting Star units, so it chose to bring in another fighter-bomber group from Okinawa. On 22 September the 51st FIG was ordered to transfer two of its three units to Itazuke, from where they would be sent into action over Korea. The 16th and 25th FISs duly moved bases, leaving the 26th FIS behind on Okinawa to perform air defence duties.

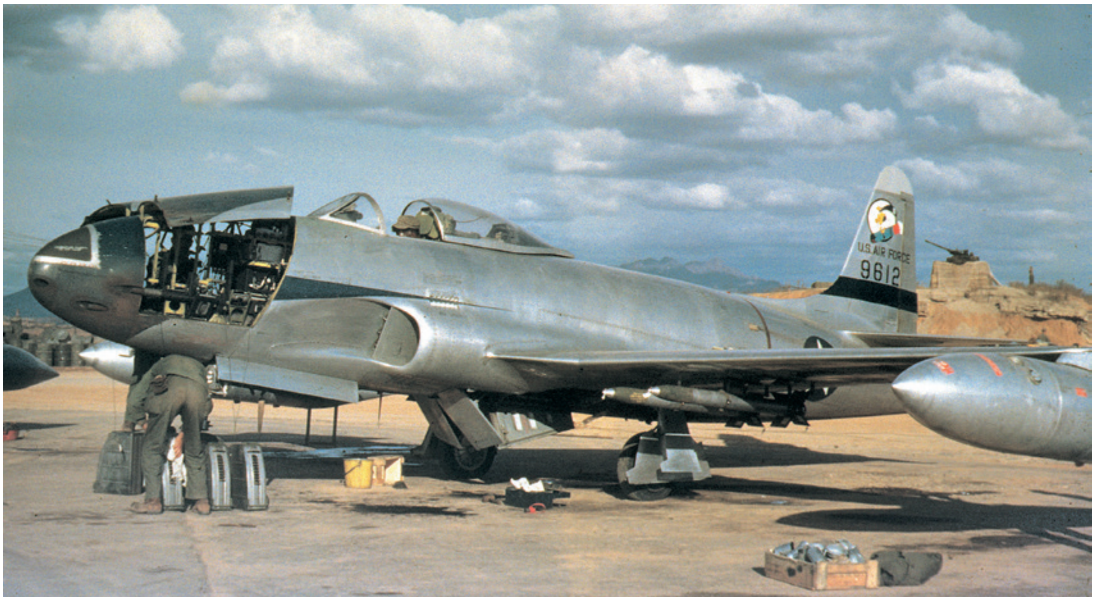
The timing of this move was perfect, for the airfields in South Korea that had been overrun by the communists in the first days of the war had recently been recaptured by UN troops and made available to the F-80 units. Able to launch from bases appreciably closer to the frontline, pilots now enjoyed far greater loiter time over key targets in the north, thus increasing the Shooting Stars' effectiveness. Sgt John Nossick, a crew chief with the 25th FIS, was one of hundreds of USAF personnel sent by troop transport ship from Okinawa to Inchon in the wake of *Chromite* in order to set up flight operations for the 51st FIG prior to the arrival of the F-80s;

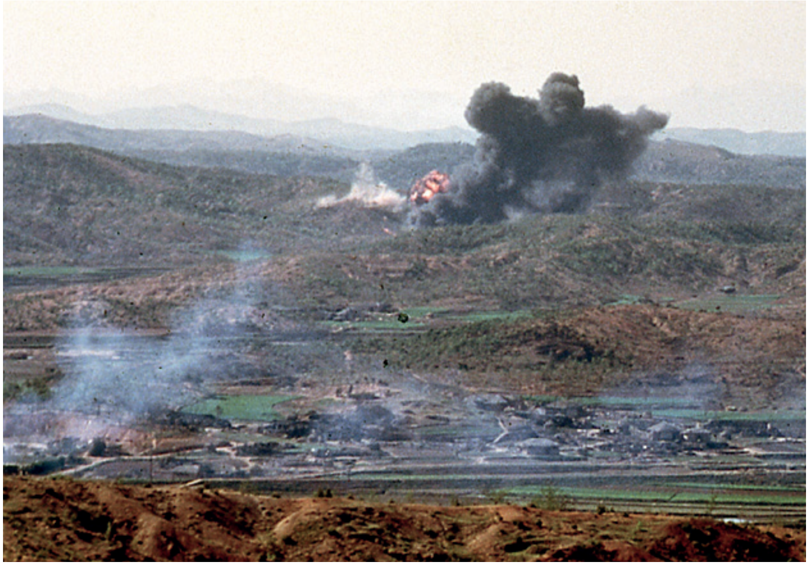
'It was unusually cold for September. Conditions seemed pretty primitive. We pumped fuel out of 55-gallon drums. We lived in tents and used a slit trench for a bathroom. Bomb holes in the runway were covered in PSP [pierced steel planking]. Shortly after we began flying, an F-80 was taking off with a full load of ammo when it hit a road grader working on the runway – the pilot was killed. Within days of us arriving at Kimpo, North Korea's last surviving Yak fighter came down and blew up our mail room! Things got so cold shortly thereafter that our JP-1 fuel wouldn't fire, so we had to start the F-80s on 140 octane gas, and then switch to JP-1 after the engines lit up.'

Amongst the aircraft looked after by Sgt Nossick, both on Okinawa and at Kimpo, was the F-80 flown by 1Lt Ted Buechler of the 25th FIS. As with his squadronmates, Buechler had logged his initial Korean War sorties from Itazuke, prior to the 51st FIG moving to Kimpo on 10 October;

'The Pusan Perimeter was still intact when I flew my very first combat mission. I took off in the No 4 slot in a flight of four Shooting Stars from Itazuke. In trail formation, we were north of the perimeter and over

Protected by a nearby AAA battery, HVAR-armed F-80C 49-612 of the 16th FIS has the magazines for its six Browning M3 0.50-calibre machine guns changed at Kimpo in the autumn of 1950. This aircraft was struck by flak during a rocket pass on the Sunan railway marshalling yards on 12 May 1951, its pilot, 1Lt Robert W Gillespie, failing to eject before the fighter-bomber hit the ground and exploded





F-80s used napalm against the enemy once Shooting Star units were based at Kimpo following the Inchon landings on 15 September 1950. This photograph of a napalm strike on retreating NKPA troops was taken by an unnamed F-80 pilot serving as a Forward Air Controller with the US Army's 7th Infantry Division. Most fighter-bomber pilots would undertake two- to three-week postings with the infantry, calling in air strikes as they provided CAS for troops in the frontline

enemy territory when we spotted a captured American Jeep occupied by enemy troops. While we were getting lined up for a strafing run on the Jeep, the driver of the vehicle made it to a nearby bridge and parked under it for safety. We managed to strafe other targets in the immediate area, however, so the mission worked out well in the end.

'During another mission several days later, we strafed various targets, and with our ammo running low, we continued northward. The Pusan Perimeter had by then been broken and the North Koreans were in full retreat. We soon spotted a loaded troop train on a siding with seemingly no place to go. We were in the third flight to hit the train. We strafed everything in sight, and there was nothing left moving by the time we finished.

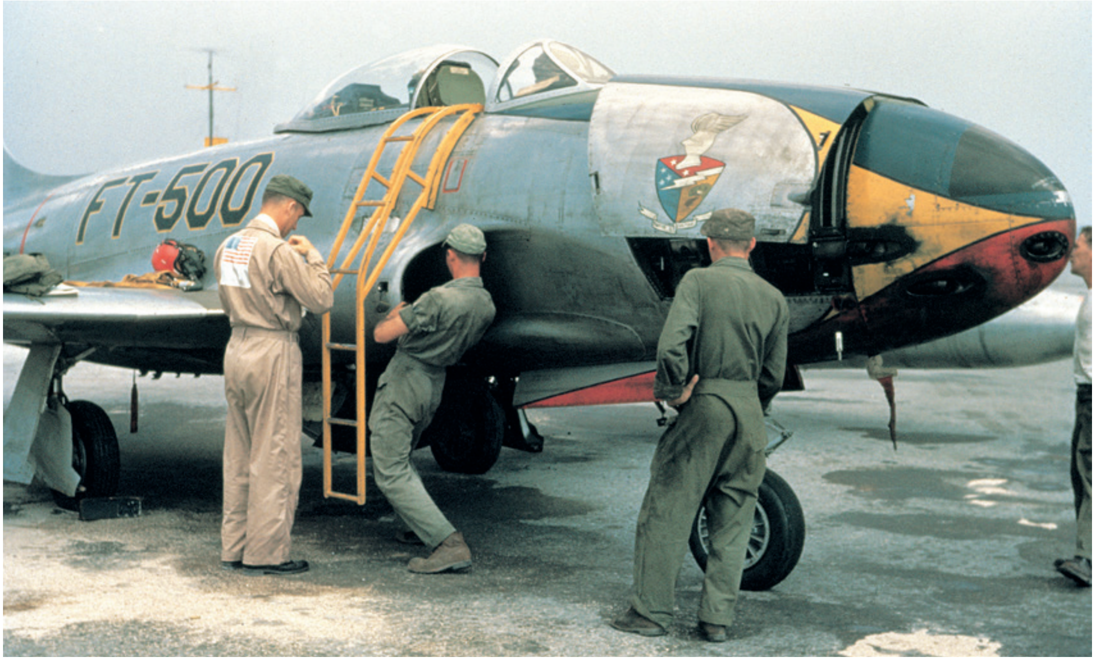
'Despite having exhausted our ammo, we continued to fly north. We then saw a ferry that was being used to cross a river, as a nearby bridge had been knocked out. Among the vehicles waiting to go across were three shiny Russian sedans. By the time we pulled over to line them up, several Russian officers (advisors) had tumbled out of these vehicles and dived into a ditch, thinking we were going to strafe them. We made a series of passes at little more than 50 ft to ensure that they stayed buried in the mud. Without a single bullet between the four of us, it was their lucky day.'

The 80th FBS had also transferred to Kimpo with the 51st FIG in October, as noted by 1Lt John S Robertson in the unit's unofficial combat diary;

'Someone started a terrible rumour that we might move to Korea, and as all bad rumours go so we go too. It had been definitely decided by this time that we would move to Kimpo and be attached to the 51st FIG for operations. We were able to prove that the 80th was always a fast-moving and transportable unit that could change locations without requiring a break in combat operations.'

Once in Korea, the 80th became an early user of napalm, as Robertson dramatically noted in the following entry;

'NAPALM, the deadly and terrifying weapon of jellied gasoline, was introduced shortly after our move to Kimpo. Immediately, the pilots became quite proficient at dropping it on targets that could not be destroyed by ordinary armament. "WHOOSH!" and the target disappeared in [a] burst of flame and smoke. Our armament section is to be complimented on the fast changeover to the many and varied types of weapons that the F-80s were carrying at Kimpo.'



Col Stanton T Smith, CO of the 49th FBG, prepares to climb aboard his F-80C (FT-500) at the start of yet another combat mission. This photograph was taken at Itazuke AB in July 1950. Note the jet's distinctive three-colour markings and the 49th FBG insignia on its nose, indicating the F-80's assignment to the group CO. FT500 was lost on 24 August 1951 when 1Lt Robert L Martin tried to ditch it after the F-80 had been hit by AAA, the fighter-bomber disintegrating when it struck a sandbar. Martin did not survive

FIRST JET FIGHTERS IN KOREA

The 51st FIG had been pipped by the 49th FBG as the first jet fighter-equipped group to operate from bases in South Korea, the latter moving from Itazuke to Taegu on 1 October. Although the 49th would subsequently receive a Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for its exploits in Korea during the first five months of the conflict, things got off to a bad start for the group soon after its arrival at Taegu. On 8 October, four pilots from the 8th FBS took off and headed for targets in northeastern Korea. The flight lead, 1Lt Bud Evans, aborted 40 minutes into the mission with an engine problem, followed by the element lead a little later – his jet had also suffered a mechanical failure. Undeterred, 1Lt Alton H Quanbeck and 2Lt Al Diefendorf joined up and continued with the mission. Maj Charles Williams of the 9th FBS explains what happened next;

'As luck would have it, the high winds at altitude over North Korea did some strange things that day, and when our two pilots let down through the undercast there was a large airfield beneath them complete with a whole gaggle of aircraft parked in neat rows. These two went up and down the place on strafing runs in their F-80s and destroyed quite a few planes parked in those rows.

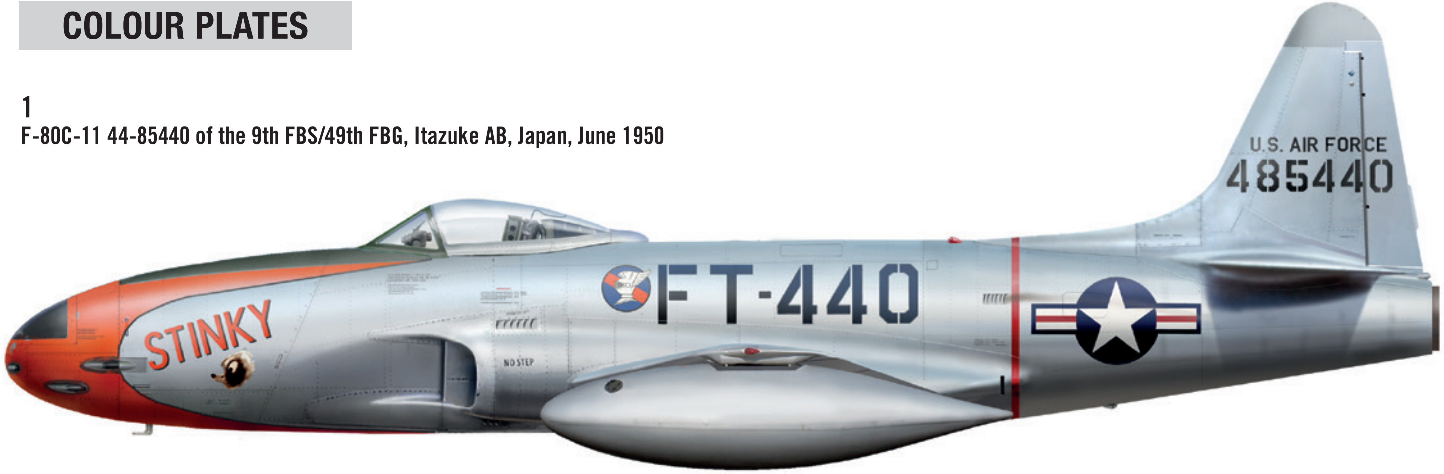
'When they got within voice range of JOC in Seoul they were understandably excited, and they reported that there were still more aircraft left unscathed on the ground after they had run out of ammo! Every fighter-bomber outfit in the air that day started heading in their direction so as to finish off any North Korean aircraft that had been left untouched. We hadn't seen any aircraft on the ground in Korea since the early days of the war, however, so JOC was understandably sceptical about the target that had been attacked.

'Things soon got very embarrassing for the 49th FBG when it was discovered that our two pilots had let down just (*text continues on page 43*)

COLOUR PLATES

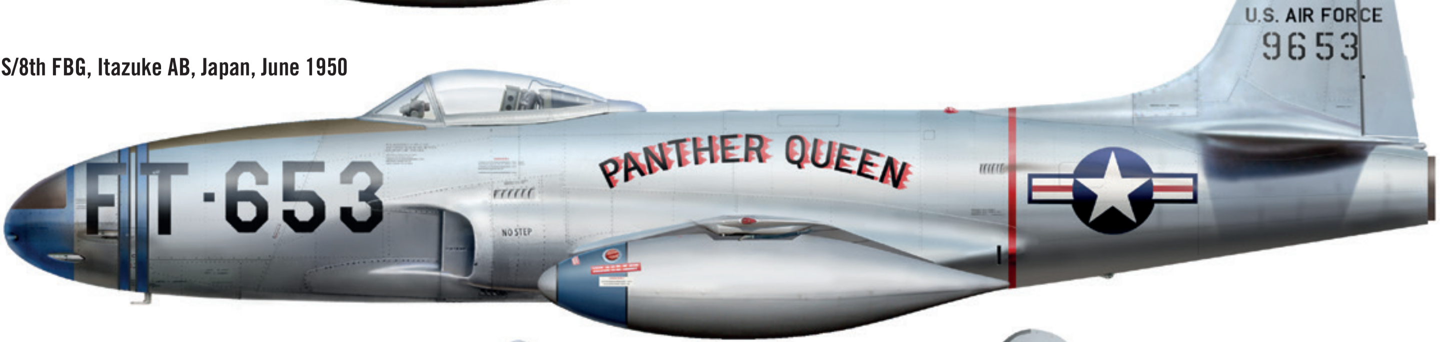
1

F-80C-11 44-85440 of the 9th FBS/49th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, June 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
485440
FT-440
STINKY
NO STEP

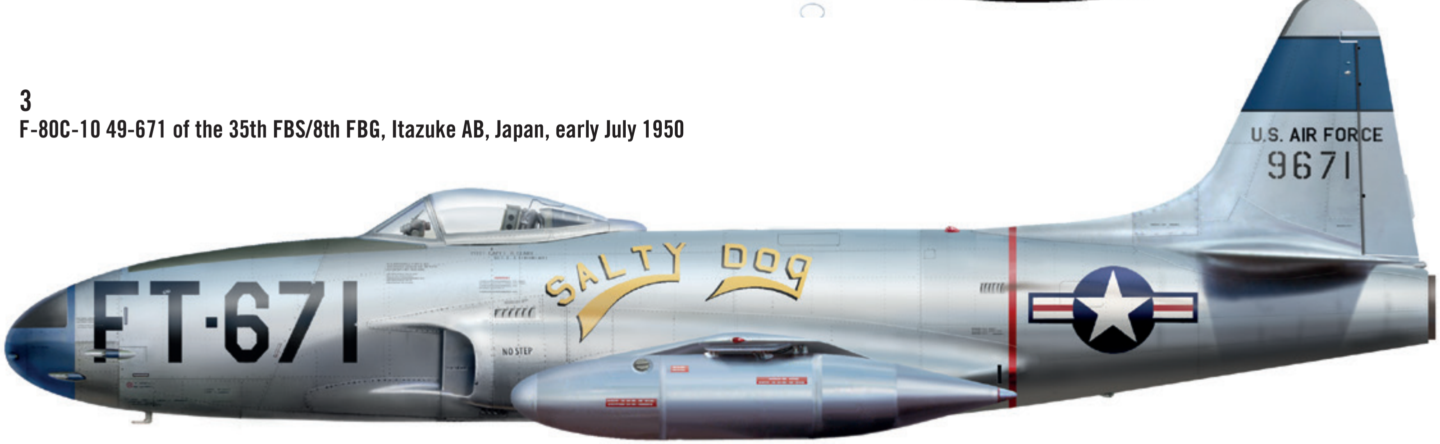
2

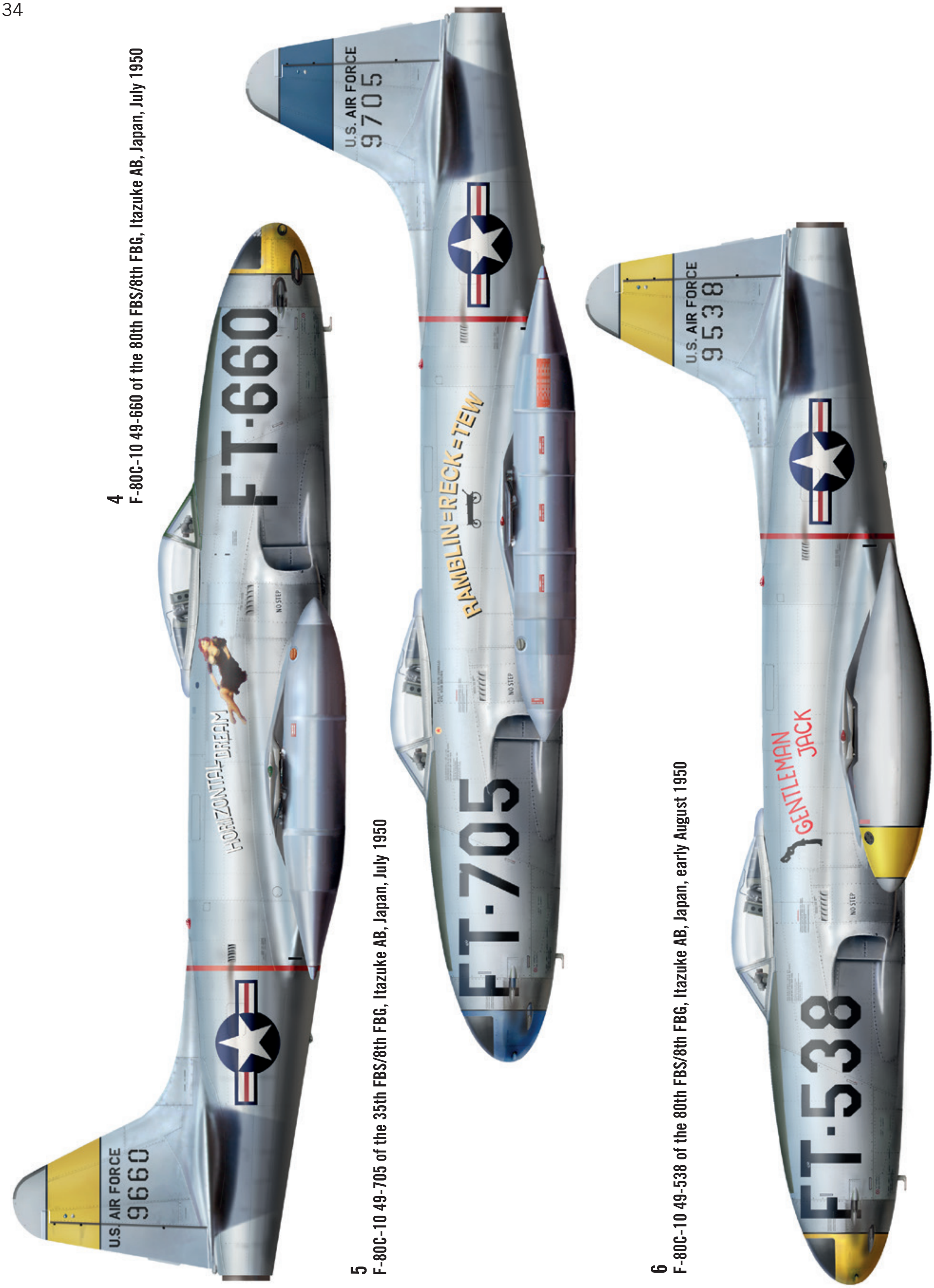
F-80C-10 49-653 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, June 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
9653
FT-653
PANTHER QUEEN
NO STEP

3

F-80C-10 49-671 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, early July 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
9671
FT-671
SALTY DOG
NO STEP

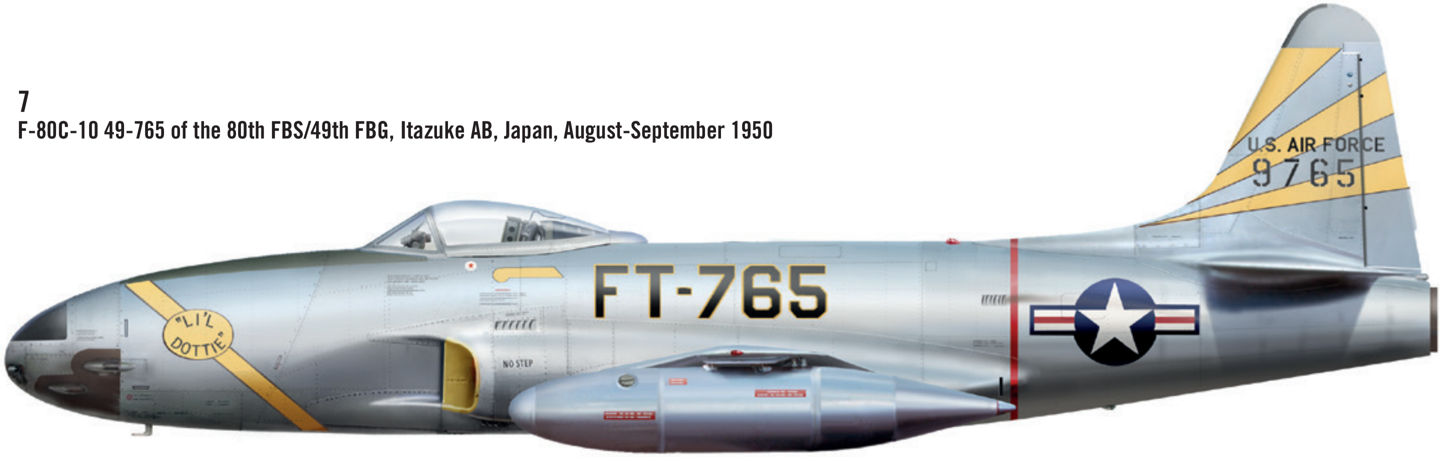

FT-660
U.S. AIR FORCE
9660
HORIZONTAL DREAM
NO STEP
FT-705
U.S. AIR FORCE
9705
RAMBLIN=RECK=TEW
NO STEP
FT-538
U.S. AIR FORCE
9538
GENTLEMAN JACK
NO STEP

4
F-80C-10 49-660 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, July 1950

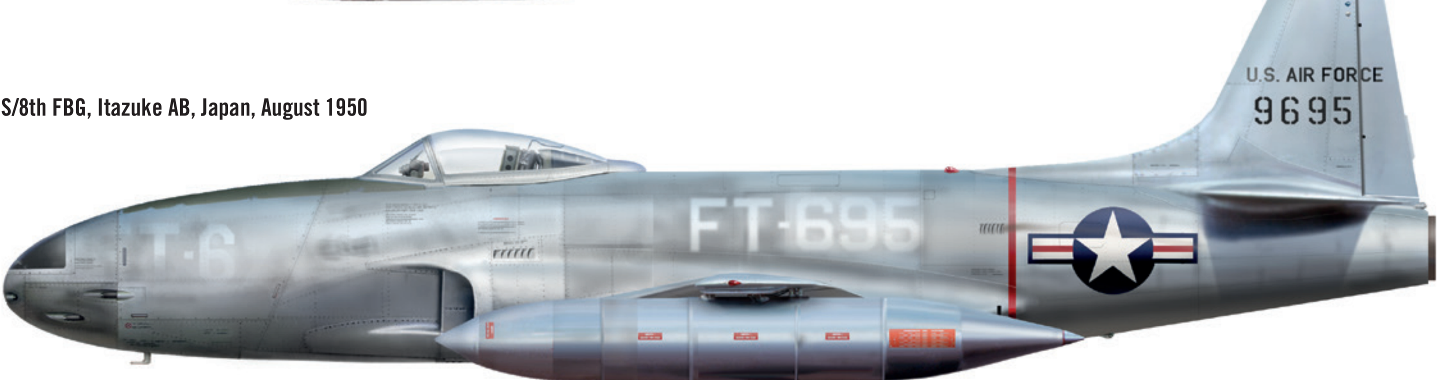
5
F-80C-10 49-705 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, July 1950

6
F-80C-10 49-538 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, early August 1950

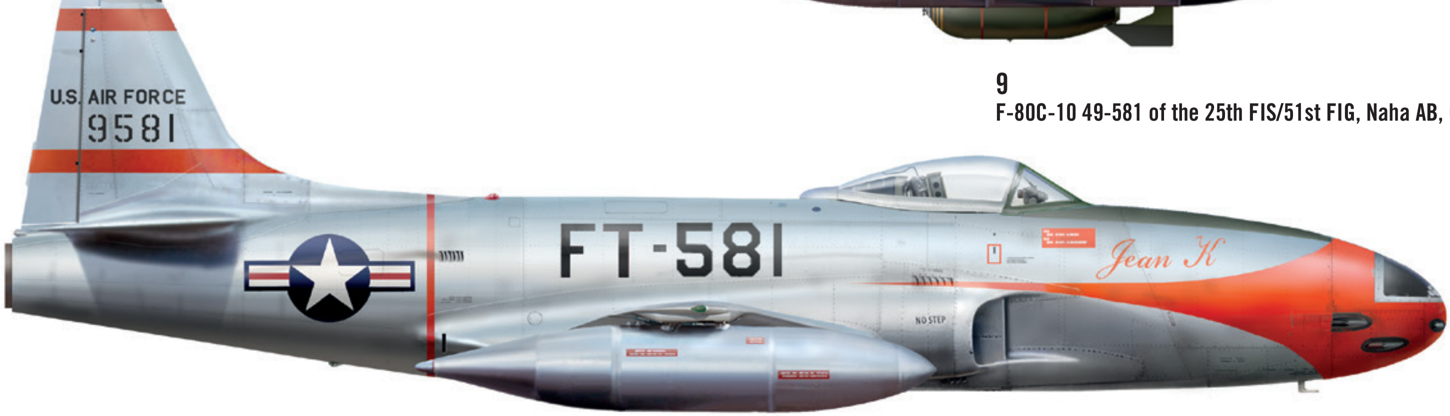
7
F-80C-10 49-765 of the 80th FBS/49th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, August-September 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
9765
FT-765
"LI'L DOTTIE"
NO STEP

8
F-80C-10 49-695 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, August 1950

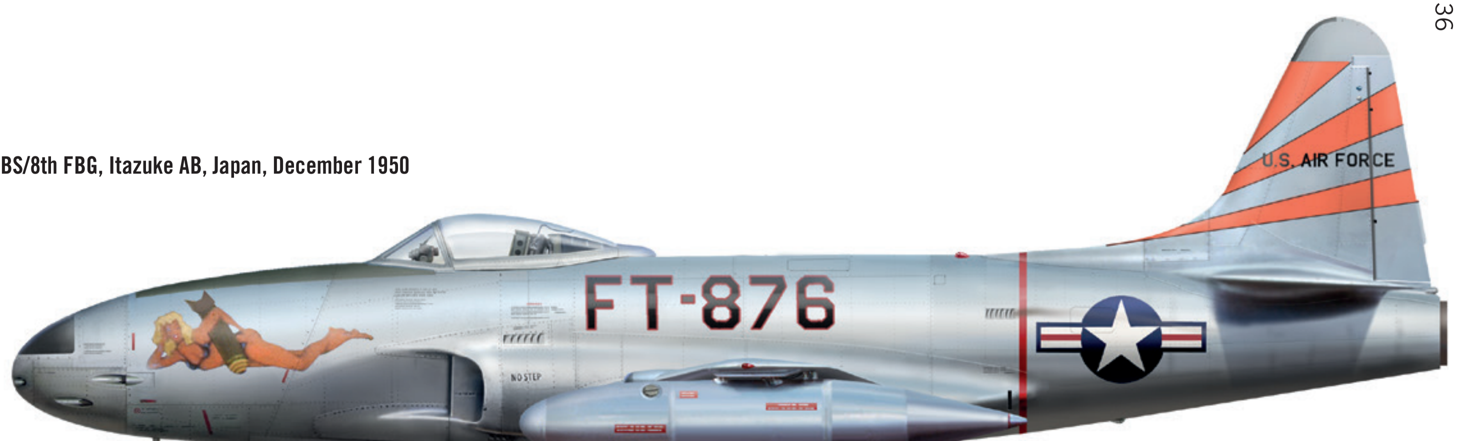

U.S. AIR FORCE
9695
FT-695
T-6

9
F-80C-10 49-581 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Naha AB, Okinawa, September 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
9581
FT-581
Jean K
NO STEP

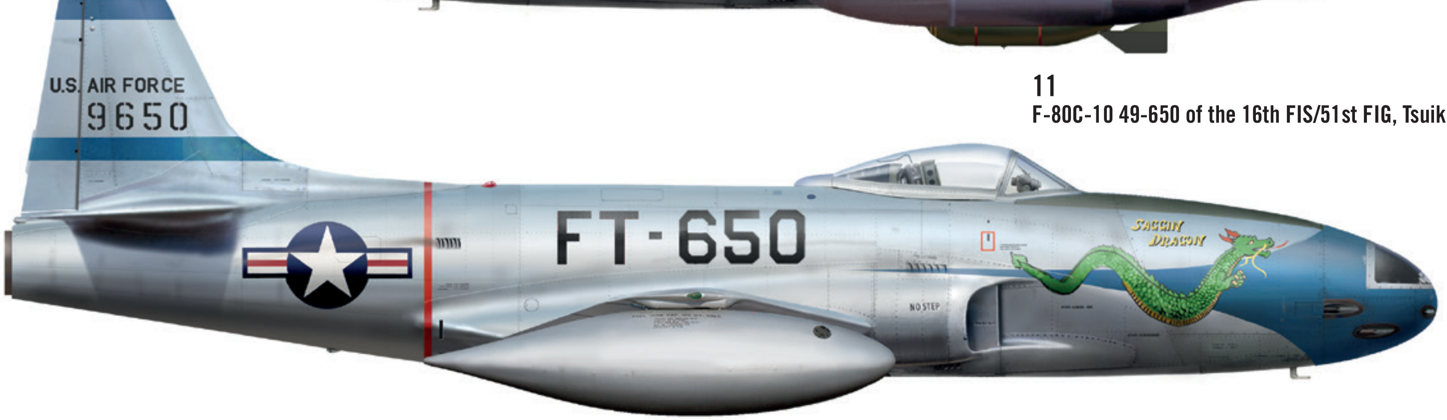
10

F-80C-10 49-876 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, December 1950


U.S. AIR FORCE
FT-876
NO STEP

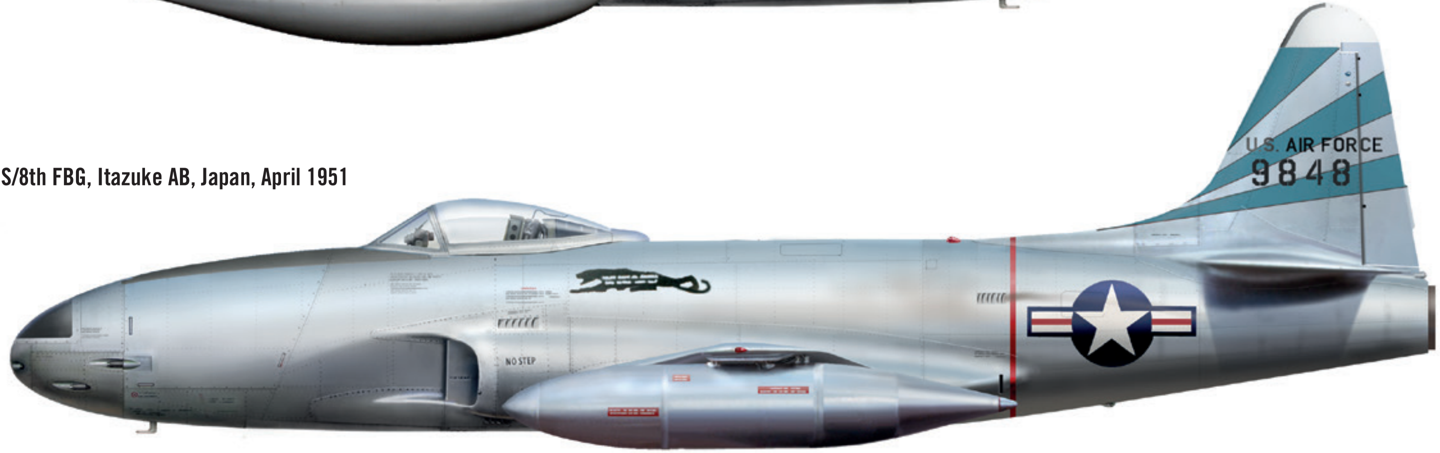
11

F-80C-10 49-650 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, February 1951

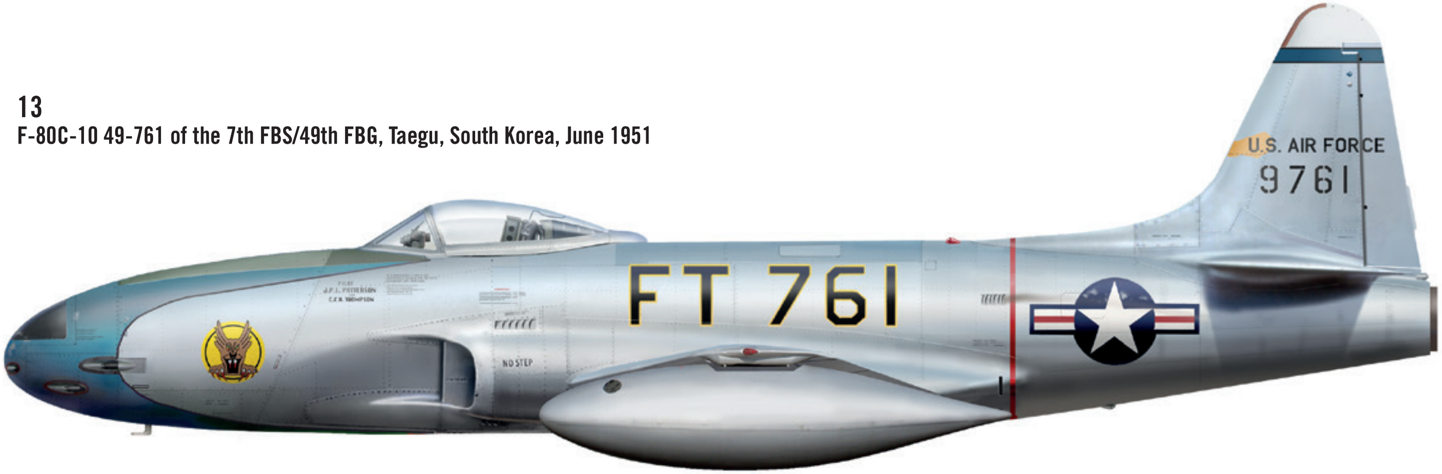

U.S. AIR FORCE
9650
FT-650
NO STEP
SAGGIN DRAGON

12

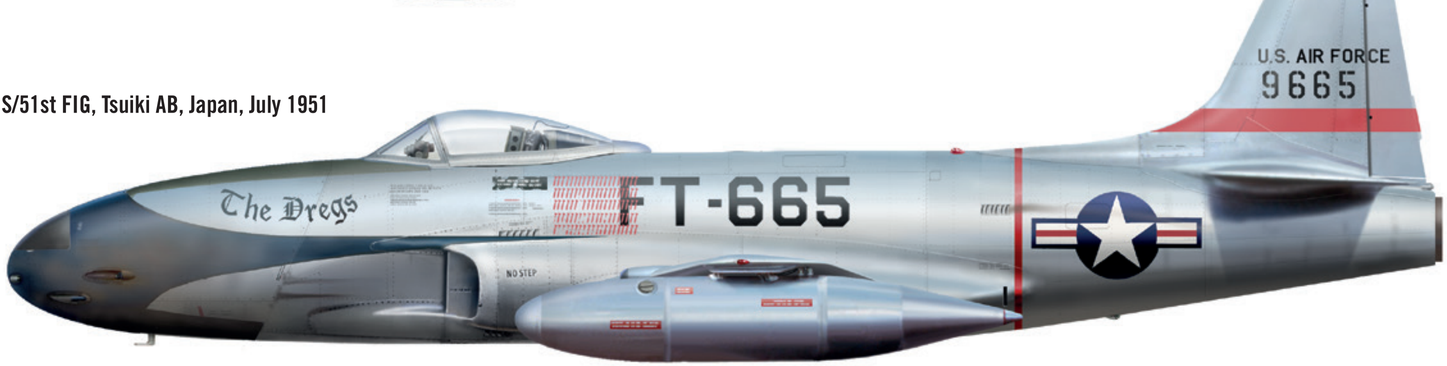
F-80C-10 49-848 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, April 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9848
NO STEP

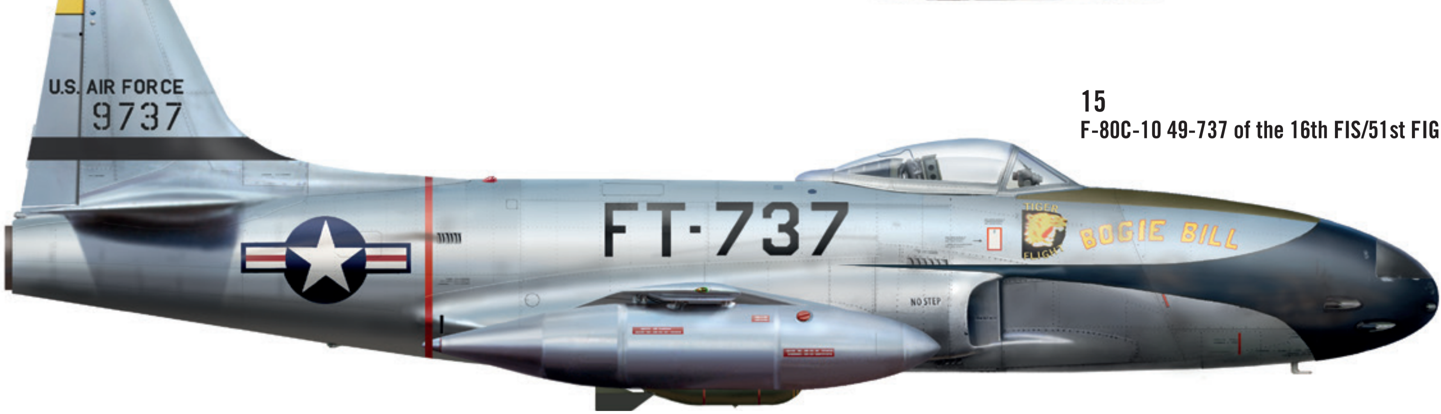
13
F-80C-10 49-761 of the 7th FBS/49th FBG, Taegu, South Korea, June 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9761
FT 761
NO STEP

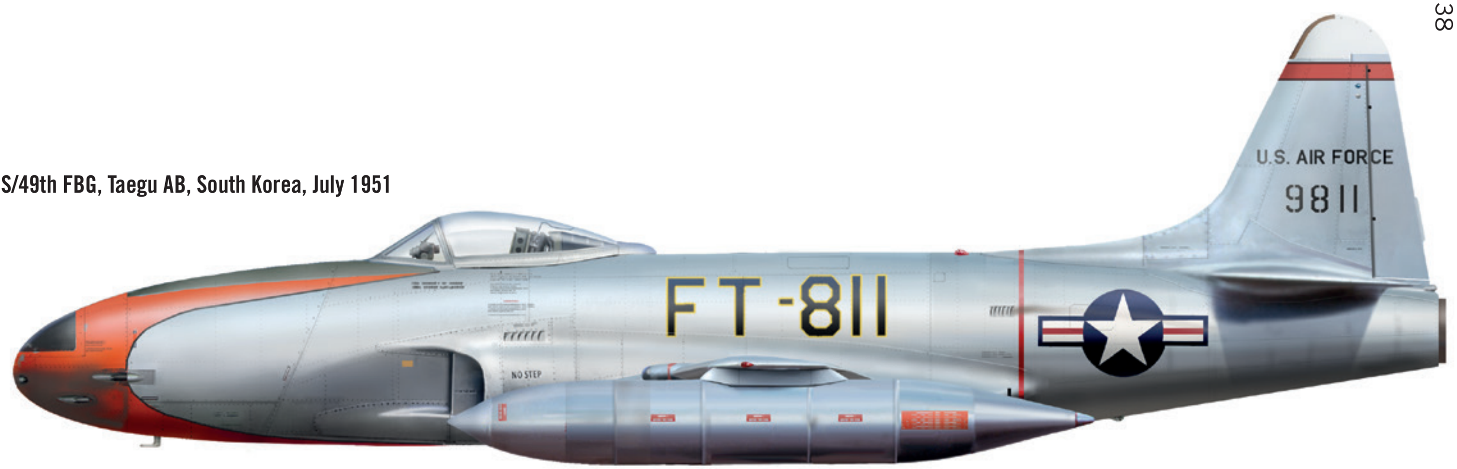
14
F-80C-10 49-665 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, July 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9665
The Dregs
FT-665
NO STEP

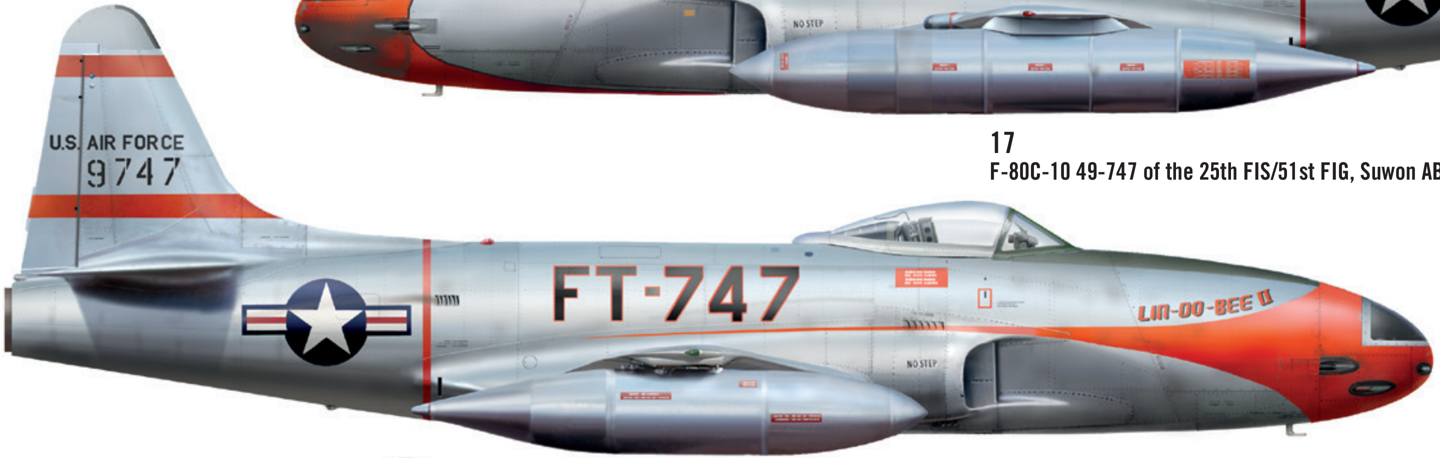
15
F-80C-10 49-737 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, July 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9737
FT-737
TIGER FLIGHT
BOGIE BILL
NO STEP

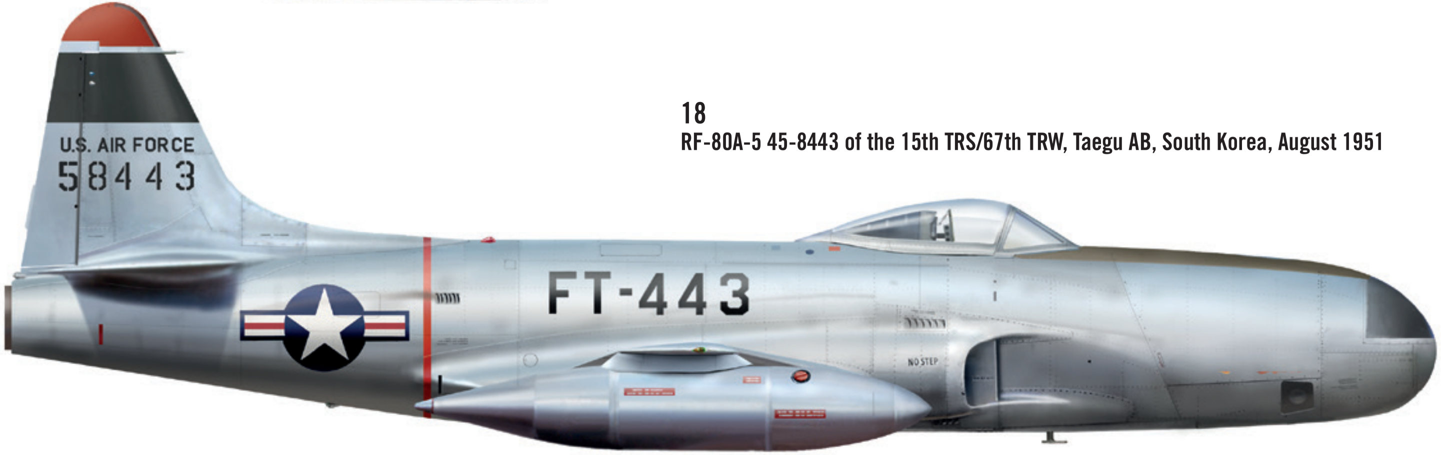
16
F-80C-10 49-811 of the 9th FBS/49th FBG, Taegu AB, South Korea, July 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9811
FT-811
NO STEP

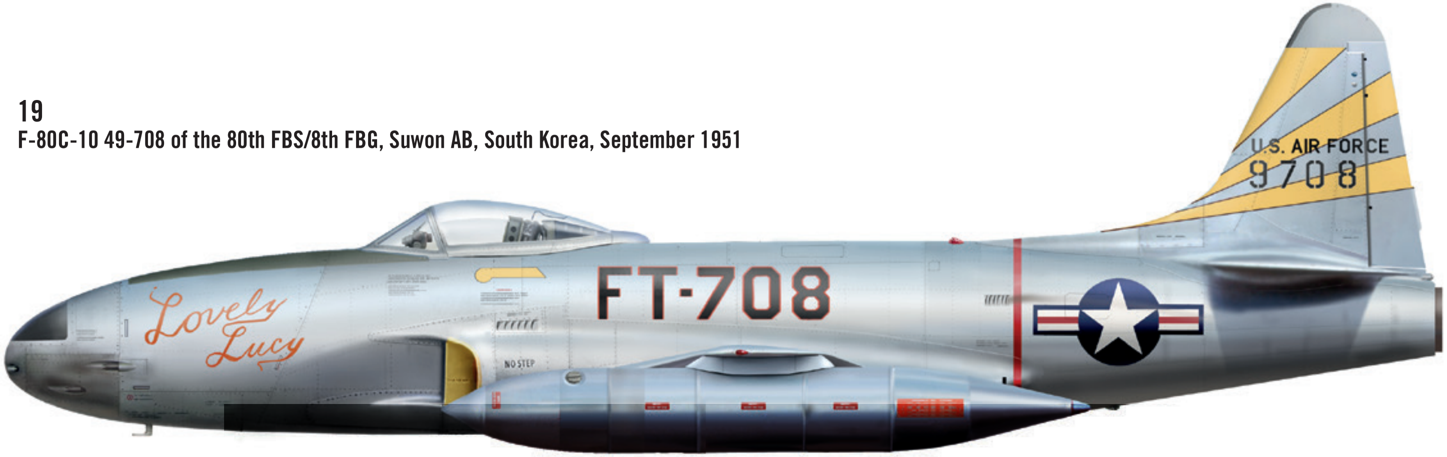
17
F-80C-10 49-747 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Suwon AB, South Korea, August 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
9747
FT-747
LIN-OO-BEE II
NO STEP

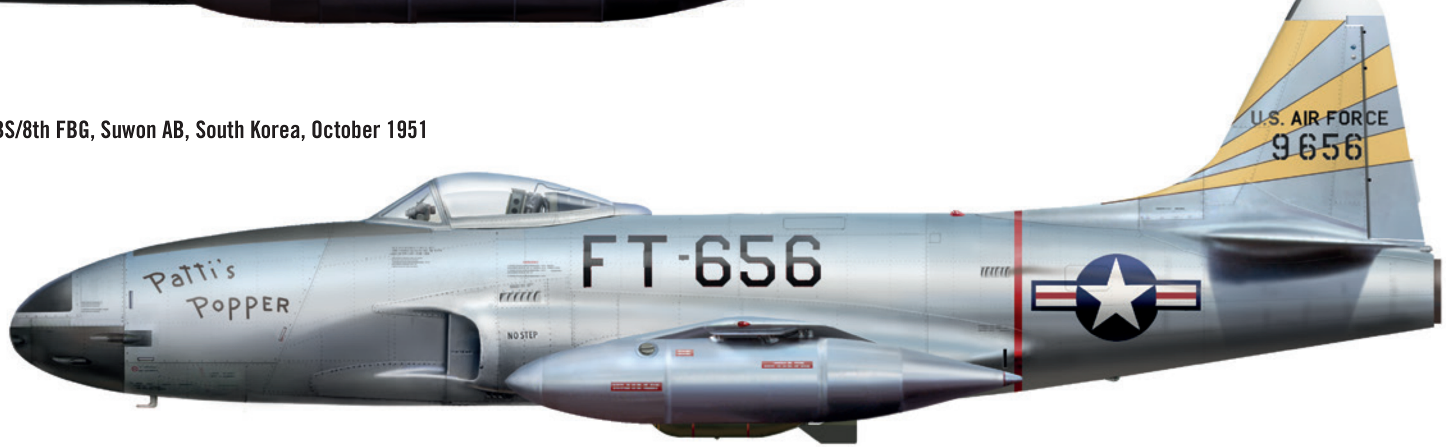
18
RF-80A-5 45-8443 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB, South Korea, August 1951


U.S. AIR FORCE
58443
FT-443
NO STEP

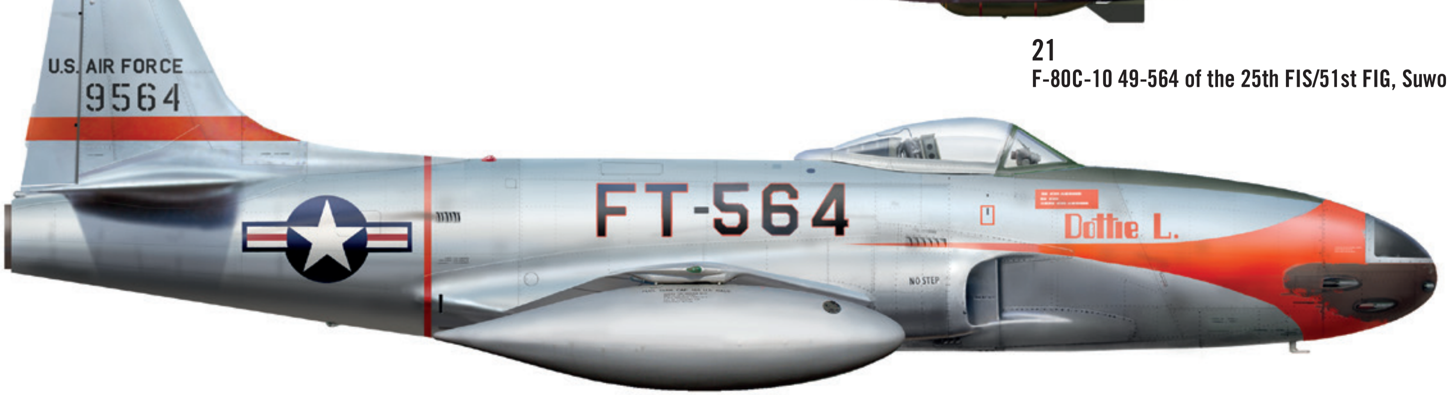
19
F-80C-10 49-708 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, September 1951

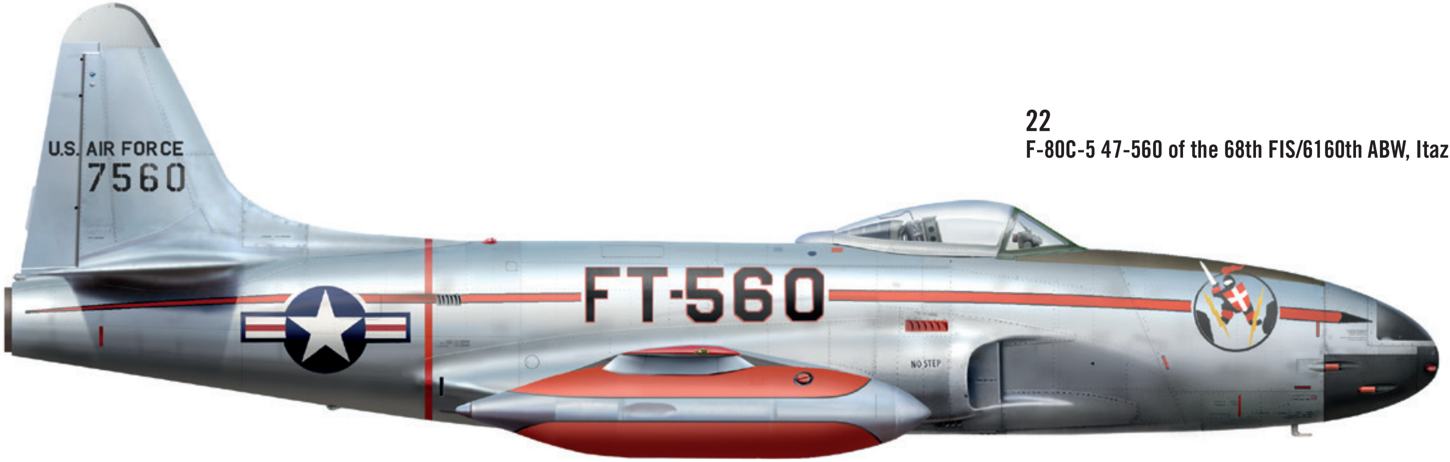

U.S. AIR FORCE
9708
FT-708
Lovely Lucy
NO STEP

20
F-80C-10 49-656 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, October 1951

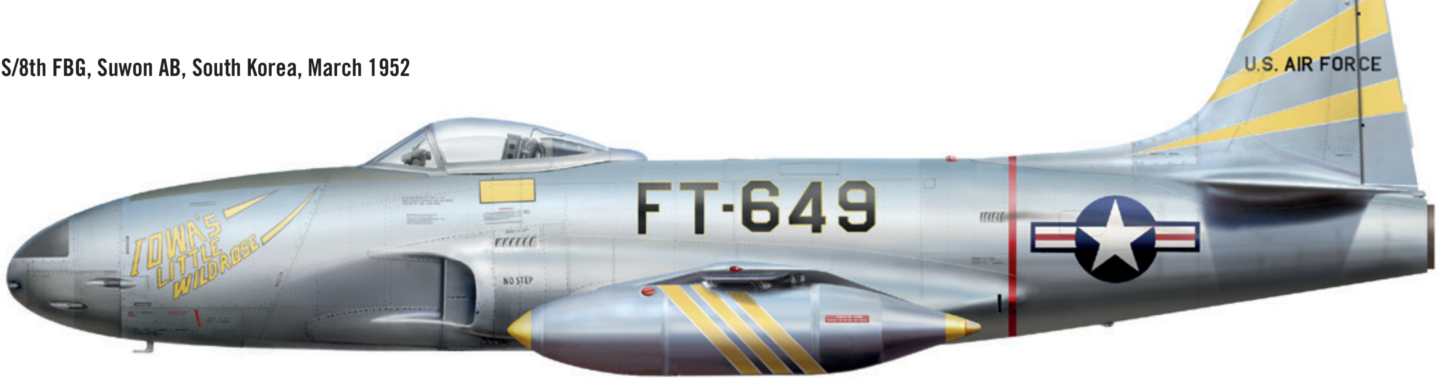

U.S. AIR FORCE
9656
FT-656
Patti's Popper
NO STEP

21
F-80C-10 49-564 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Suwon AB, Japan, October 1951

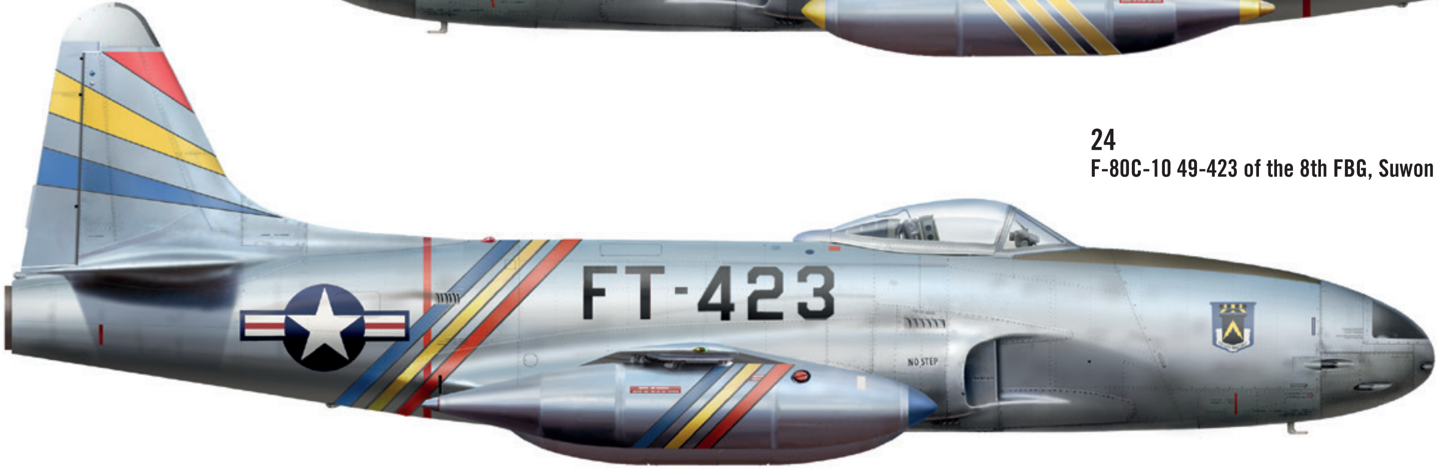

U.S. AIR FORCE
9564
FT-564
Dottie L.
NO STEP


U.S. AIR FORCE
7560
FT-560
NO STEP

22
F-80C-5 47-560 of the 68th FIS/6160th ABW, Itazuke AB, Japan, early 1952


U.S. AIR FORCE
FT-649
IOWA'S LITTLE WILDROSE
NO STEP

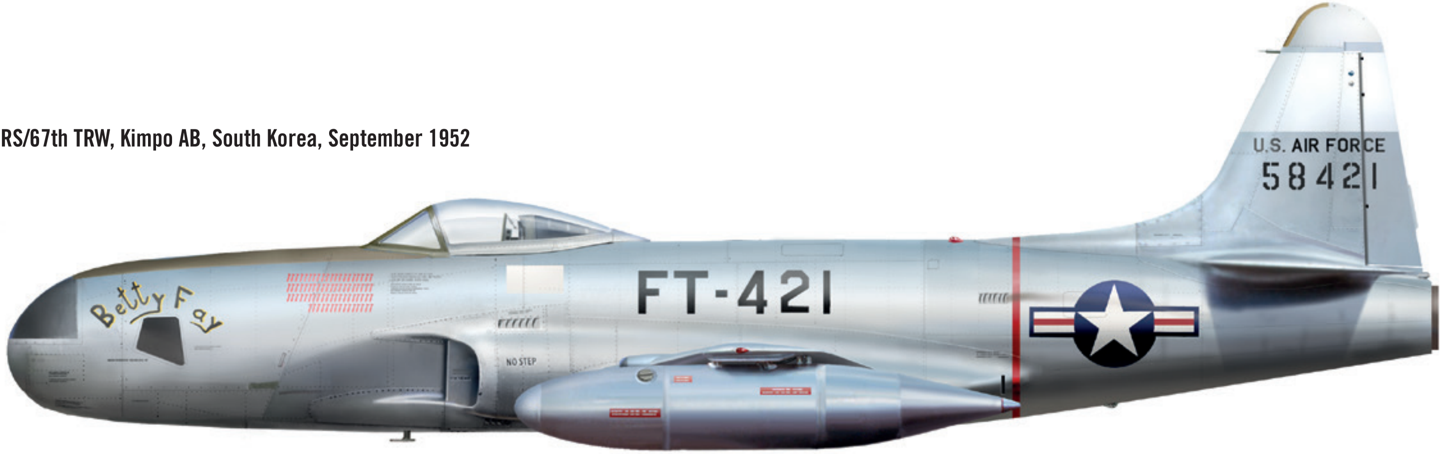
23
F-80C-10 49-649 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1952


FT-423
NO STEP

24
F-80C-10 49-423 of the 8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, May 1952

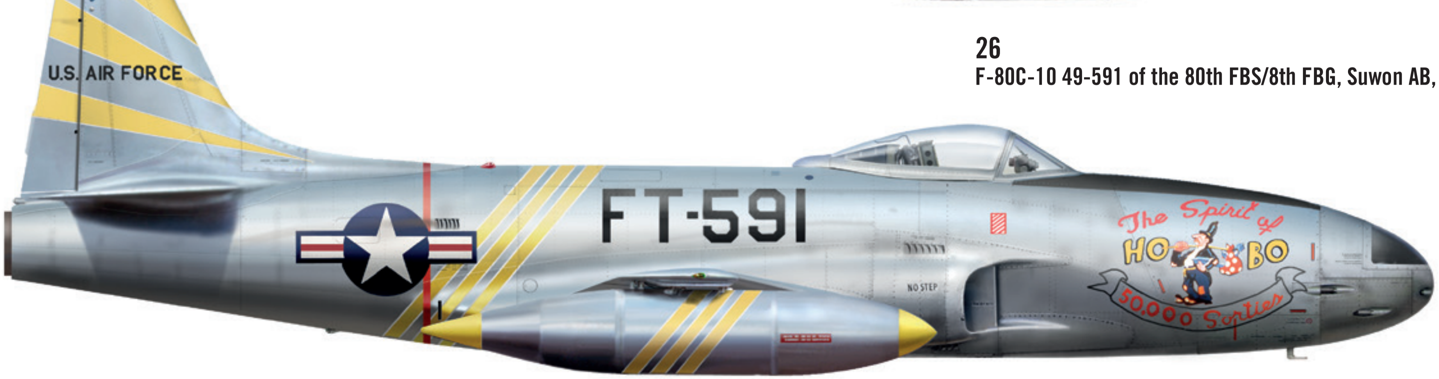
25

RF-80A-5 45-8421 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB, South Korea, September 1952


U.S. AIR FORCE
58421
FT-421
Betty Fay
NO STEP

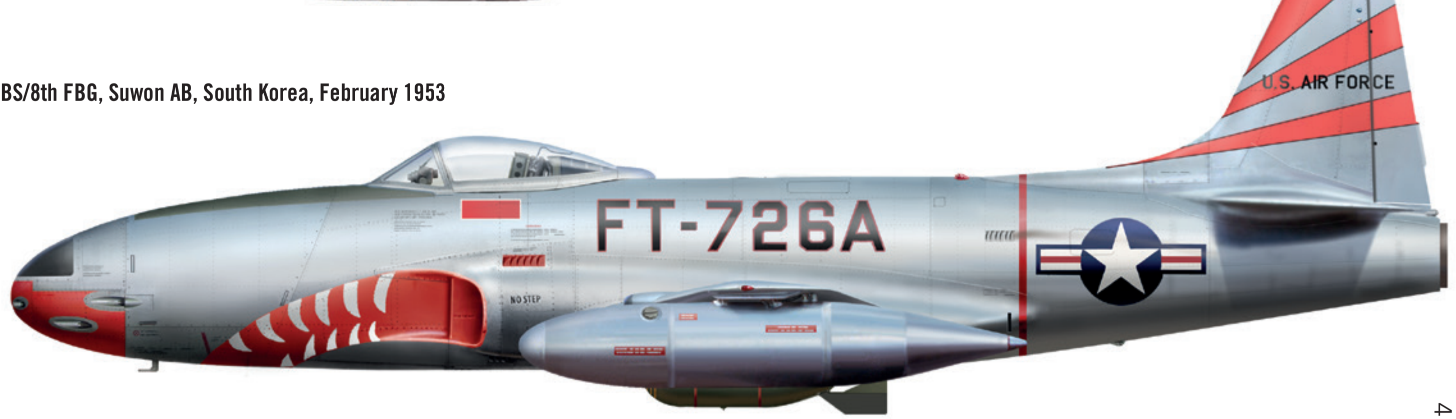
26

F-80C-10 49-591 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, October 1952

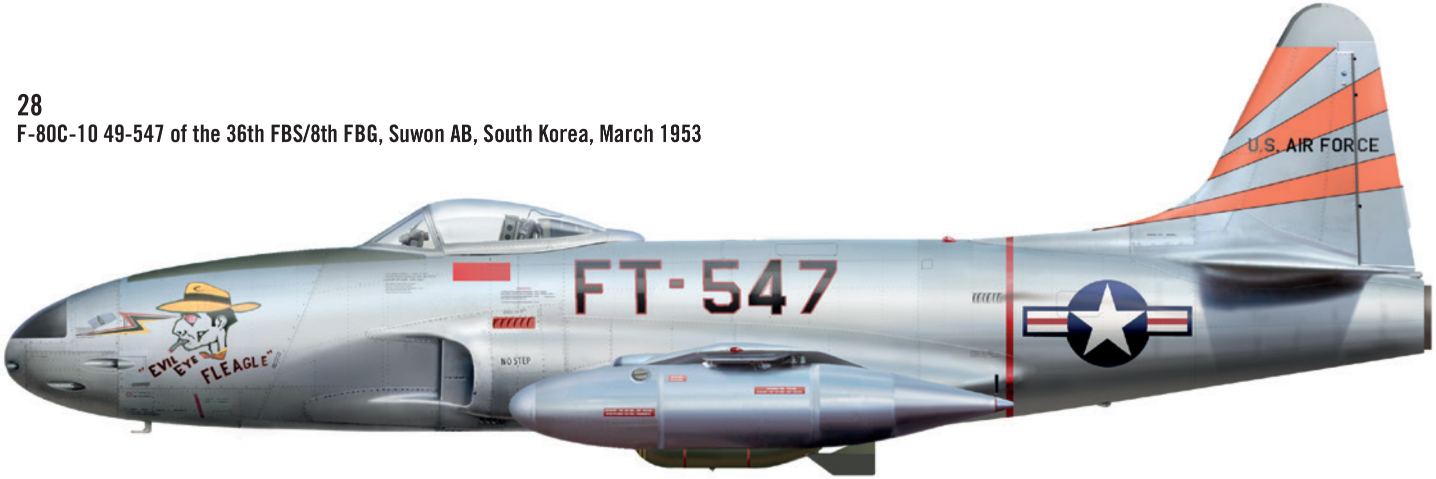

U.S. AIR FORCE
FT-591
NO STEP
The Spirit of
HOBO
50,000 Sorties

27

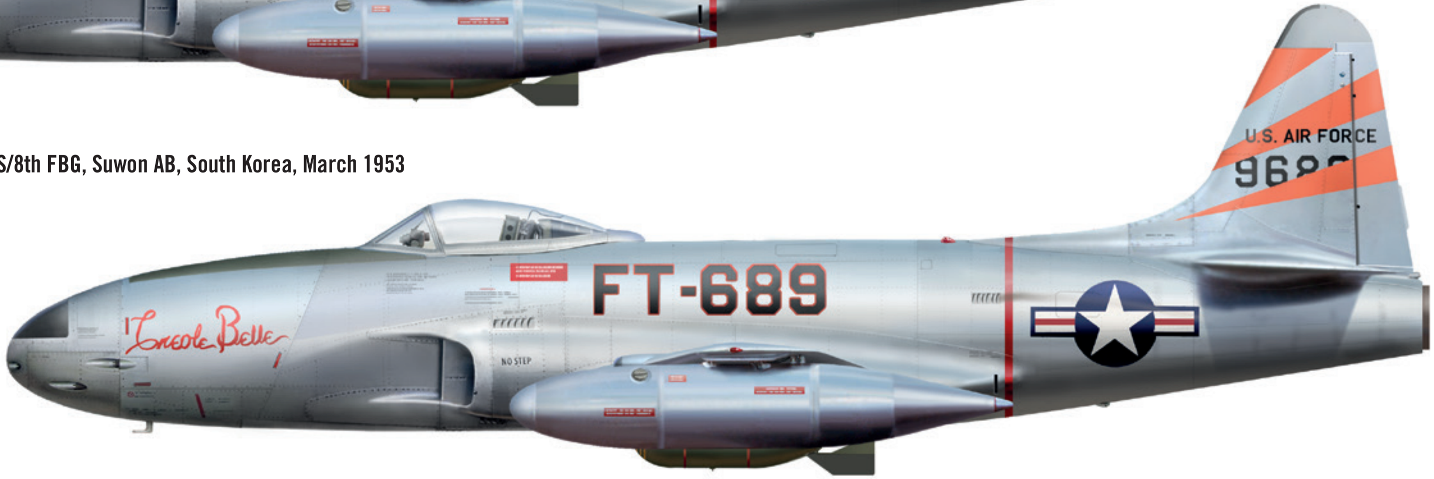
F-80C-10 49-726 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, February 1953


U.S. AIR FORCE
FT-726A
NO STEP

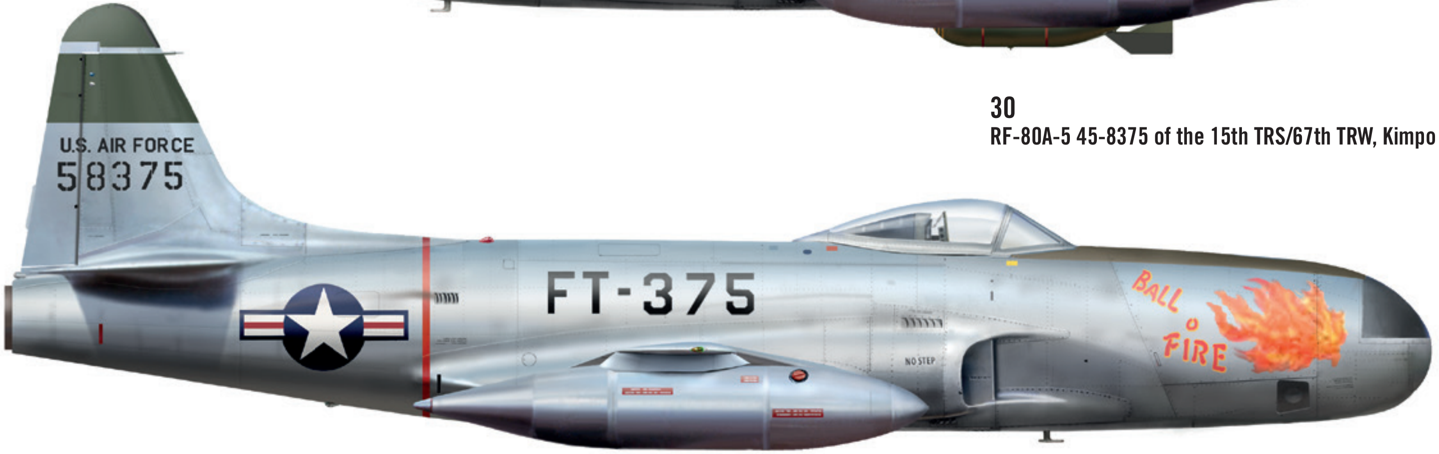
28
F-80C-10 49-547 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1953


U.S. AIR FORCE
FT-547
"EVIL EYE FLEAGLE"
NO STEP

29
F-80C-10 49-689 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1953


U.S. AIR FORCE
968
FT-689
Creole Belle
NO STEP

30
RF-80A-5 45-8375 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB, South Korea, May 1953


U.S. AIR FORCE
58375
FT-375
BALL O FIRE
NO STEP

south of Vladivostok and destroyed a number Russian aircraft. All hell broke loose in the UN, and the Russians cried a lot. Gen Hoyt Vandenberg, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, threatened to pull the 49th out of the FEAF, but settled for relieving group CO, Col Stanton Smith, of his command instead. The two pilots involved were court-martialled, but found not guilty on all charges. Nevertheless, neither aviator flew any more combat missions.'

As previously noted, despite this incident, the 49th FBG still received a DUC. Admittedly, every F-80 group that saw combat in the war received such an award. Nevertheless, these were not given out at random, but were earned the hard way. Capt Russell E Taliaferro of the 7th FBS served with the 49th FBG throughout this period, and he flew myriad sorties from both Itazuke and Taegu;

'We hit many targets of opportunity while undertaking road reconnaissance missions. The rules of engagement in those days allowed us to hit anything on the enemy side of the "bomb line". We routinely strafed communist troops marching towards the frontline in the open, cavalry formations, villages, fortifications, trains, river boats, gun positions and supply dumps.

'By the time that fall set in, the thought of being home by Christmas kept us [in] high spirits. We were particularly optimistic after the Inchon landings, which sent the North Koreans into a massive retreat, but our spirits faltered quite a bit when our troops bogged down just north of Pyongyang in November 1950, even before the Chinese had entered the war.

'By then the weather got so bad that it was impossible for our maintenance personnel to keep our F-80s in the air, as the howling wind and below freezing temperatures forced them [to] work well below their usually high standards. For some reason it was almost impossible to get gloves and parkas shipped into some of the forward air bases, despite these supplies being warehoused and kept in the Philippines. It also took an inexplicably long time to get wooden fences erected at Taegu to keep some of the wind off of us.'

MiGs

The first sightings of Russian-built MiG-15s south of the Yalu River in early November changed the freedom with which the F-80s overflew North Korea. The first knowledge the USAF had of the existence of the superlative communist fighter came via blurred imagery caught on F-51 gun camera film in late October. The communist fighters were aircraft of the Soviet 29th Fighter Aviation Regiment, which had secretly deployed 40 MiG-15s from Kubinka, near Moscow, to China as early as March 1950. It had subsequently been joined by the 151st Aviation Division to form the 64th Fighter Aviation Corps. By November, the MiG regiments were ready for combat.

After initially engaging F-51s, the Soviet pilots claimed that they intercepted ten F-80s on 1 November and shot one of them down. The USAF list two Shooting Stars losses for that date, with a 51st FIG jet falling to AAA during a morning strike on Sinuiju airfield and the second

F-80 (from the 49th FBG) having also been downed by ground fire during a rocket attack near Unsan. There is no mention in the records of any interception by MiG-15s, however.

Several days later, Lt Col Clure E Smith, CO of the 51st FIG's 25th FIS, obtained the first clear gun camera film of the Soviet jet, thus confirming its presence over the frontline;

'I was leading a flight of four F-80Cs that were patrolling along the Yalu opposite Sinuiju AB. At that moment, I saw four aircraft taxi out from Antung AB, across the Yalu River in China, takeoff and then form up as they climbed to altitude. They were flying considerably faster than piston-engined fighters, so I knew that they must be jets. They crossed the Yalu about 5000 ft below us. I let them get well across before we attacked, as I did not want to be engaging Chinese or Soviet aircraft over China by mistake.

'I called for my flight to jettison wing tanks, after which time we dove on them. Seconds later they saw us and jettisoned their tanks – except for the leader, whose tanks refused to come off. He was the one I went after, for with his wing tanks hung up, his MiG had no speed advantage over my F-80. I fired several rounds at the enemy aircraft and saw multiple hits, but he kept flying and went back across the Yalu, streaming black smoke as he seemed to lose control. We were not allowed to cross north of the Yalu, so I don't know if he crashed or made a safe landing. Fortunately, my gun camera had captured some good images of the MiG, and they were quickly sent back to intelligence analysts in the Pentagon so that they could finally see what we were now flying against.'

It quickly became obvious to the FEAF that the MiG-15 posed a serious threat to the UN's continued air supremacy in-theatre, so the decision was made to post the F-86A Sabre-equipped 4th FIG to Korea. The plan was for the very latest USAF jet fighter to counter its Soviet counterpart, while F-80s and F-51s continued to pound targets on the ground. However, the Sabres would not arrive in Korea until mid-December, and it was inevitable that Shooting Stars would clash with MiG-15s again well before then. In fact, the two types fought each other as early as 8 November 1950.

On this day, four F-80s from the 16th FIS targeted AAA sites around the airfield at Sinuiju, where previous flights had reported several 'Yak-type' fighters in the area several hours earlier. The senior pilot in the flight was the 16th's CO, Lt Col Evans G Stephens, and on his wing was 1Lt Russell J Brown. The latter was on his first mission 'up on the river' (he was on temporary duty with the 16th FIS

Lt Col Evans Stephens, CO of the 16th FIS, poses on the flightline at Taegu. He was heavily involved in his unit's first encounter with the MiG-15 on 8 November 1950, Stephens claiming to have damaged one of the new Soviet fighters. His wingman, 1Lt Russell Brown, went one better, however, being credited with the destruction of the first MiG-15 to fall to UN forces in Korea

Four 51st FIG pilots pose for the camera at Kimpo AB in the autumn of 1950. Second from the right is 1Lt Russell J Brown, who made history when he became the first USAF pilot to shoot down a MiG-15 in a highly publicised engagement fought over North Korea on 8 November 1950. Assigned to the 51st FIG's 26th FIS at the time, Brown was on a Temporary Duty (TDY) assignment with the 16th FIS when he achieved his MiG kill

from the Okinawa-based 26th FIS), and it was his element that felt the brunt of the attack from the MiG-15s. The following account draws on the experiences of both Lt Col Stephens and 1Lt Brown. The unit CO remembers;

'It was a beautiful day, and after we had successfully delivered our bombs on target, we took up a heading to the southeast in a low-angle climb to gain distance and altitude. As flight leader, I used 97 per cent power so as to allow the rest of my flight to join up after their strafing passes.

'At this time, while doing our best to avoid the AAA coming up at us from Manchuria, I heard some radio chatter from another flight that stated there were numerous aircraft taking off from Antung airfield and heading south across the river – I started a shallow turn to the left for a better view in that direction. I would guess that we were about four miles south of the Yalu, and the Nos 3 and 4 aircraft in my flight were about a quarter-mile behind us. 1Lt Brown, my wingman, was about 100 yards away at my "four o'clock".

'Shortly thereafter the AAA stopped and I spotted 12 MiG-15s at about 2500 ft below us – four off to the left of us, four to the right and four behind us. As flight leader, I began edging to the right to try and get beneath that flight of four MiGs, thus reducing the odds a little. We were flying in a northwesterly direction at this time.'

1Lt Brown vividly remembers that when Lt Col Stephens called out that there were 12 MiGs north of the river, they were showing no sign of turning to the south;

'As a matter of fact, they were doing loops and barrel rolls! I thought to myself that this has got to be a crazy war when the enemy can practice stunt flying right in front of you! Suddenly, all hell broke loose. Lt Col Stephens shouted for me to break left. An instant later two flashing silver aircraft dove at me out of the sun. As they swept by, I opened the throttle and tacked onto the tail of one of them, trying to manoeuvre into a firing position. As I tried to close on the enemy fighter, my F-80 started buffeting badly because I was exceeding 0.80 Mach. These were definitely MiGs, and I got a clear look at the communist jet as we bottomed out and it started a very fast climb back up into the sun. The aircraft had no distinguishing markings – just polished aluminum, swept wings and plenty fast!'

Lt Col Stephens continues;

'As the lead MiG passed me, I could see a red star on the side of the fuselage. By the time I could get a good pursuit curve on the lead, he was at least 1500 ft out, and moving away. I held a long burst on him and saw some debris come off of his left wing. At that time, he turned sharply and headed for the safety of the Yalu. I rolled to the left and caught a glimpse of a lone F-80 in a steep dive about 3500 ft below me. He was pursuing what appeared to be a MiG, and their rate of speed appeared to be at the "Max". Out of pure instinct, I looked for the rest of my flight, and also to see if any MiGs were at my "six o'clock". I did not see any enemy activity in the immediate area except the one F-80 chasing the MiG.'

1Lt Dick Escola, also from the 16th FIS, came close to shooting down a MiG-15 just moments after Lt Col Stephens had fired at his opponent;

'Suddenly, as I glanced to my right, I saw a MiG-15 descending across my path at high speed. It was well within bore-sight range, leaving me to quickly try and figure out where my 0.50-calibre rounds would actually go. I aimed in the general direction that my gunsight displayed and "walked" the rudders a little to make up for not knowing just where to aim. Evidently I guessed wrong because I did not see any of my rounds hit the MiG as he whizzed by.'

26th FIS pilot 1Lt Dick Escola prepares to fly a practice intercept mission off the coast of Okinawa during the late summer of 1950. Like the rest of his squadronmates, he would see combat flying with either the 16th or 25th FISs during TDY assignments – Escola completed numerous operational sorties with the 16th FIS, coming close to downing a MiG-15 on 8 November 1950

1Lt Brown, who was flying the F-80 spotted by Lt Col Stephens chasing the MiG-15 in a steep dive at high speed, enjoyed more success when he eventually opened fire on his opponent;

'When the MiG ahead of me broke to the left, he made a fatal mistake. There was little doubt that he could climb faster than me, but when he turned, I cut him off and got in four good short bursts with my guns. It was difficult to tell if I had hit him for he just rolled over and headed for the deck in a steep dive. I racked my F-80 around and followed him down. My airspeed was indicating over 600 mph, but I could not close the gap! At this time, he was about 1000 ft away when I gave him another four bursts. Black smoke poured from the right side of his fuselage. I knew it was now or never, so I squeezed off one long burst. Orange flames licked back over his fuselage and, suddenly, the entire MiG exploded in mid-air. After that I don't remember what happened, as I was too busy trying to pull out of my high-speed dive.'

This all-jet dogfight had lasted only a minute, yet it created a sensation with the US press corps in-theatre. Unknown to everyone at the time, it was only a portent of things to come. The MiG-15 pilots continued to grow in confidence, fully aware that their most dangerous adversaries then in-theatre were flying inferior straight-winged F-80s and F9F Panthers.

F-80s VERSUS THE 'MIGHTY DRAGON'

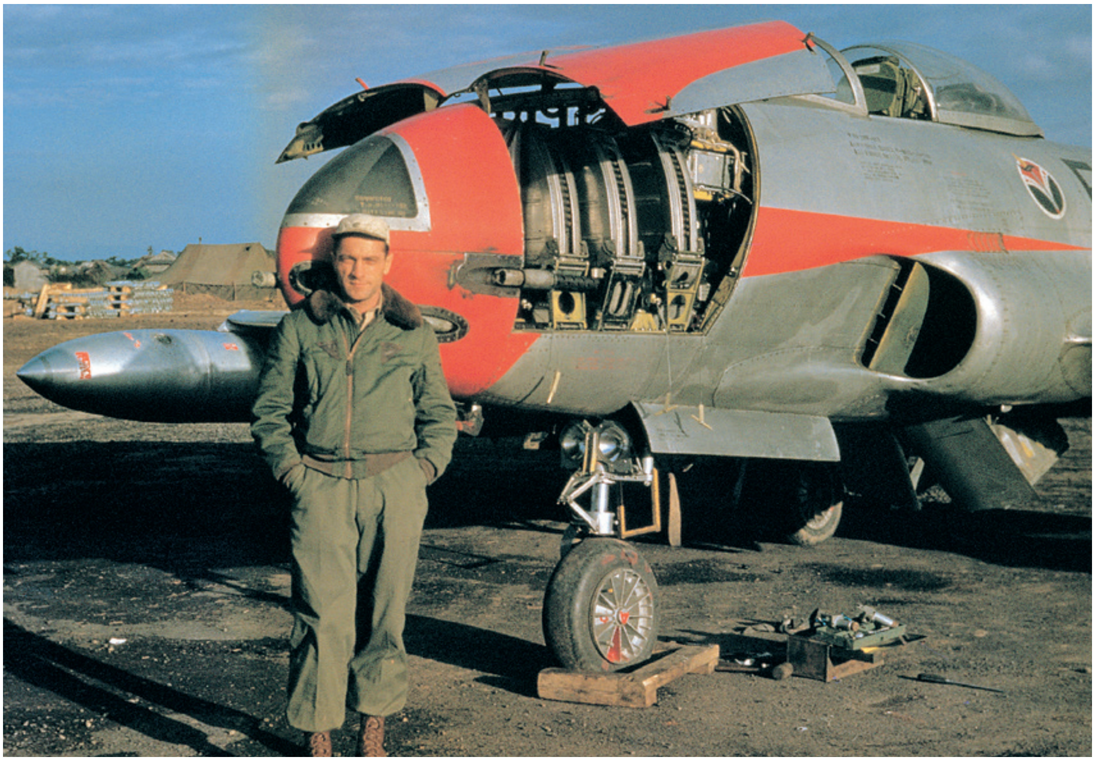
UN forces experienced the highs and lows of war during the course of November 1950. Having pushed the NKPA back north across the 38th Parallel and driving on to seize the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, the battle-weary troops were expecting the war to be over by Christmas. However, on 25 November, the combat-hardened Chinese PVA – ably led by Marshal Peng Dehuai – advanced into North Korea in substantial numbers (between 150,000 and 230,000 men), leaving UN forces with little choice but to retreat in the face of overwhelming communist numerical superiority.

The warning signs that the Chinese were moving a substantial number of troops across the frozen Yalu in preparation for the surprise invasion had been totally ignored by Gen Douglas MacArthur and his staff. Travelling under the cover of darkness, Chinese soldiers had been regularly detected by patrolling B-26 crews, as well as US Marine Corps nightfighter pilots who were hunting communist trucks driving south on the main supply route between Manchuria and Sinuiju. MacArthur's intelligence picture was based almost exclusively on photographs generated by daylight reconnaissance flights performed by RF-80s. These missions were flown to a rigid schedule, and once the Chinese figured out when the jets were due they simply camouflaged their invasion preparations.

With the NKPAF having 'gone silent' in late August, the F-80 units in-theatre abandoned their air superiority mission and flew myriad interdiction and CAS sorties. During September and October, the jets delivered just about every type of ordnance against targets across the length and breadth of North Korea.

Controlling the skies, the UN seemed to have an equally strong grip on the ground war too, although this was all set to change on 25 November, when the PVA's 13th Army Group attacked the ROKA's I and II Corps and the US Army's Eighth Army. The firepower directed at the Korean troops in particular soon ensured a breakthrough in the UN frontline, and within hours the communist offensive was in full swing. At first there was total disbelief within Gen MacArthur's HQ that such an attack could have been launched, but on the morning of the 26th stark reality set in, for UN positions were being overrun by a truly massive Chinese force.

At this point in the war, all six F-80 squadrons in-theatre were operating from Korean soil. This meant that they could give better aerial support for troops on the ground, and they were quickly called into action. Three of these units were assigned to the 51st FIG at Kimpo, which was soon threatened by the PVA as it advanced south towards the DMZ. As the USAF prepared to evacuate the airfield (the 51st's last two F-80s departed on 3 January 1951, just 24 hours before Kimpo and nearby Seoul fell to the PVA), pilots continued to fly a seemingly endless series of ground attack missions from the base as they attempted to slow the enemy's progress. Capt John Kropenick, operations officer for the 25th FIS and



Within hours of the 25th FIS having arrived at Itazuke from Okinawa on 22 September 1950, the squadron flightline had become a hive of activity as the 51st FIG prepared to send two of its three units to war. Standing by his aircraft is 25th FIS CO Lt Col Clure Smith. The jet is in the process of having its guns checked after they had been loaded with 0.50-calibre ammunition prior to flying its first sortie. A little over six weeks later Smith would obtain the first clear gun camera film of a MiG-15, thus confirming its presence in Korean skies

the USAF's high time jet pilot, was heavily involved in both the planning and execution of a number of the missions flown during this tense period as the group defended Kimpo.

1Lt Ted Buechler of the 25th FIS routinely flew with Capt Kropenick at this time, and he gave the following account of a mission led by the unit's highly experienced operations officer;

'We took off in a flight of four, despite the weather being marginal. The Chinese would take advantage of low cloud cover to make major troop movements during daylight hours – something that could not be done safely in clear weather. The poor conditions were not a problem for Capt Kropenick, however, as he knew dead reckoning pretty well. We let down in close formation through the clouds, hoping to break out as we got close to the ground. When we came out in a valley between two mountains, the roads in the immediate area were clogged with enemy troops and vehicles. We quickly ran out of ammunition after making a few passes, leaving behind plenty of dead soldiers. We all received DFCs for that mission.'

When Chinese troops reached the outskirts of Seoul and the north bank of the Han River, Kropenick led a mission in which the F-80s took off, fired rockets at the oncoming enemy soldiers and then landed all in the space of ten minutes. For a short while Shooting Stars from the 51st were only on the ground between sorties at Kimpo for as long as it took to refuel and rearm them.

Kropenick's CO, Lt Col Clure Smith, also saw plenty of action during the bleak winter of 1950-51;

'Once the Chinese had kicked us out of Kimpo and we had moved back to Itazuke [followed by another base change to Tsuiki, in western Japan, on 15 January 1951], we again encountered problems with our fuel load. We couldn't fly to Korea and spend enough time over the target area at low altitude and still get back to Japan. Our 165-gallon tip tanks were replaced with the new, elongated, 265-gallon "Misawa" tanks, which would sometimes drag along the runway and leak.

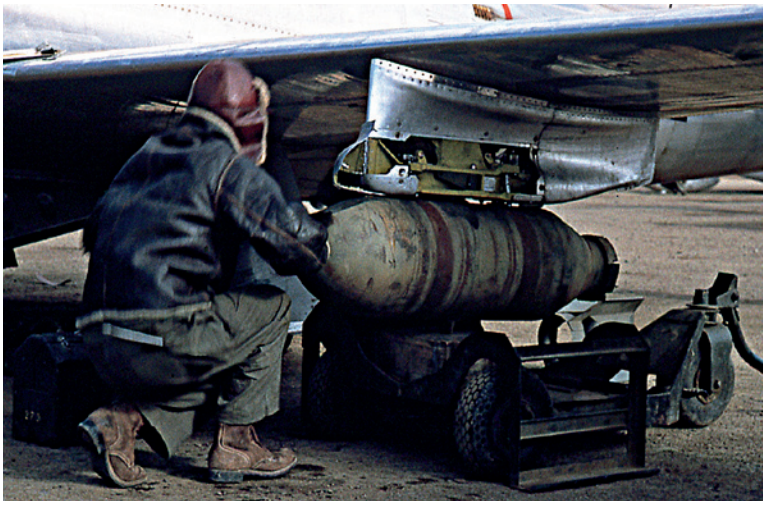
'With the Chinese in the war, our targets changed. We had to destroy the bridges across the Yalu River, plus all of the railway lines, so they loaded us with 1000-lb bombs instead of the regular 500 "pounders", plus we could also carry four five-inch rockets. Now, our jets were routinely carrying two 265-gallon "Misawa" tip tanks, two 1000-lb bombs and four five-inch rockets. There was no way that the F-80s were going to get off the ground under their own power with all that extra weight, so the groundcrew mounted single JATO [jet-assisted take-off] rockets on either side of the fuselage. We were told that these would help us get airborne before we ran out of runway, and I remember praying a lot as I rolled past the point of no return!'

Any type of ordnance that could be quickly used in the defence of Kimpo was slung under the wings of the F-80s in the days prior to its evacuation. 16th FIS pilot 1Lt Carl Ebneter was sent aloft on several occasions in jets armed with four five-inch rockets;

'On one mission I attacked a T-34 tank with two rockets that did not hit the mark, so I decided to strafe it with my guns. I forgot to reset my gunsight, and on a long firing pass I could not see any hits. About 200 yards beyond the tank a large explosion occurred, and I realised that my guns had overshot the tank and hit a temporary ammo dump. It was an example of dumb luck and marginal marksmanship!

'A short time later, we were launching from Kimpo and I was leading the second element. We were going after a nearby supply route. As I pulled up after my first strafing pass, I noticed a gun position firing at me from a ridge. I decided to fire two of my rockets at it. As I fired, one of the rocket motors exploded, smashing the drop tank beneath my left wing. It also took out the firing and arming wires for the adjacent rocket, leaving me with a hot rocket and a badly shaking aircraft (and pilot).

'After slowing down below 200 mph, the buffeting stopped. My flight leader came underneath for a close look at the damage, and he told me that I had two holes on the underside of the wing. We debated whether to try and salvo the rocket, but decided not to as it looked secure. I also knew that salvoing did not always work, and when the



The most destructive weapon cleared for carriage by the F-80 in the Korean War was the 1000-lb general purpose (GP) bomb, a finless example of which is seen here being attached to the port underwing pylon of F-80C 49-944 of the 8th FBS/49th FBG at Taegu in December 1950. Although captured communist troops stated that they feared napalm the most, 'thousand pounders' had the capacity to destroy bunkers deep underground rocket failed to drop in flight, it usually released on landing. In that event, my only means of escape was to eject, for the rocket would have exploded. Needless to say, I made one of my smoothest landings ever!'

Sgt Eugene O'Connell, a crew chief from the 51st FIG's 16th TFS, recalled what it was like on the ground at Kimpo in those final days immediately prior to its evacuation;

'Between Christmas and New Year, all of us were ready to get out of there. We kept every available aircraft loaded and flying. We could clearly hear the sound of the enemy's big guns shelling the frontline a few miles to the north, and the noise was getting closer all the time. We burned napalm in 55-gallon drums so as to keep warm. The big C-119s continued to haul out equipment and personnel while we kept our F-80Cs on the go.

'The final two bombed-up jets to launch out of Kimpo took off without drop tanks and flew directly back to Itazuke. About midnight, the C-119s came and got us, with muzzle flashes from enemy guns only a mile away! The only rest we got was while we were airborne, for when we landed, every man was kept busy preparing for a huge strike against the base we had just abandoned. The strike was to be carried out with napalm. Our pilots later reported that the street that ran through our old tent city was jammed with Chinese troops going through all the equipment and personal items we had left behind. Our F-80s dropped their napalm all over the area, completely engulfing the communist troops. Their casualties must have been high, and the satisfaction felt by our pilots was shared by the entire squadron and group.'

MIXING IT WITH MiGs

The appearance of more MiG-15s south of the Yalu River dramatically increased the threat now facing UN fighter-bombers as they attempted to target the advancing PVA. Although the new communist jet fighters had only been seen in small numbers at first, they began to challenge F-51s and F-80s more frequently following China's entry into the conflict. Their primary mission was to prevent the PVA from being targeted by the fighter-bombers, several flights of MiGs scrambling from their base at Antung whenever UN aircraft were detected.

When engaging bombed-up F-80s, for example, the communist pilots would dart south across the Yalu as if they were going to take on the USAF fighter-bombers directly. Upon seeing this, the USAF pilots would jettison their tip tanks and external ordnance (bombs, rockets or napalm) in order to stand a better chance of defending themselves against the superior MiGs. Satisfied that the fighter-bombers could no longer pose a serious threat to the PVA, the MiG pilots would break off their pursuit of the F-80s and bolt back north of the river, thus avoiding confrontation and knowing that they had accomplished their mission.

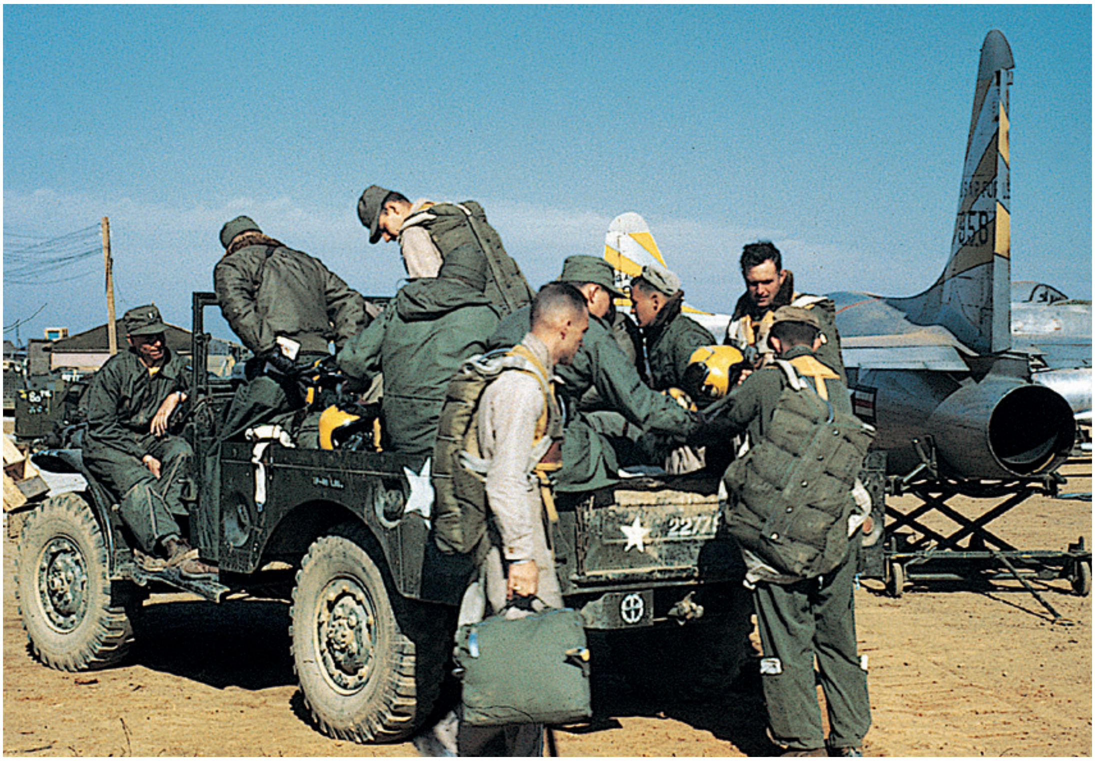
In short order, the Shooting Star pilots came up with a workable solution to this growing problem – when the MiGs crossed the Yalu, they would jettison their wingtip tanks only, giving the enemy pilots the impression that their bombs had been unloaded too. The MiGs would then head back north of the river and the F-80s could continue to their intended targets.

The Shooting Star pilots reported widely varying numbers of MiGs around the Yalu at this time, with only a handful on some days and seemingly unlimited quantities on other occasions. The 8th FBG's Maj James Hill (who would eventually become a four-star general) completed 128 missions in the F-80 in Korea, and he regularly encountered MiG-15s in the challenging weeks leading up to the arrival of the F-86 in-theatre;

'On one mission, our flight engaged fast-flying MiG-15s, and in both confrontations the enemy fighters turned tail and ran after we had jettisoned our tip tanks. The next day, the same thing happened, and this time I managed to fire bursts into their leader's left wing, causing him to roll twice to the left with his wing smoking. Before I could line up a second burst, the MiG was lost in the haze – his wingman followed him down. Upon returning from that mission, I was credited with a "probable".

'I guess we must have got the MiGs stirred up because on the next mission, which was a dive-bombing attack on a railroad bridge, our flight was jumped by six MiG-15s. We scattered, and for the next 15 minutes it was one wild melee. We made several head-on passes on the communist jets, but I don't believe there were any hits achieved by either side.'

Despite their vulnerability to the MiG-15s, the F-80 pilots continued to bomb targets along the Yalu River at this critical time in the conflict. The 80th FBS's 1Lt John Robertson made light of the potentially deadly threat in the unit's unofficial combat diary;



Laden down with parachutes, helmets and flight bags, pilots from the 80th FBS climb aboard a Dodge three-quarter-ton T214 truck (with a WC52 weapons carrier body) prior to being driven out to the Kimpo flightline for yet another mission against the retreating NKPA in October 1950. F-80 squadrons kept the maximum number of aircraft bombed up and in the air during this period. These aviators would probably have had to fly north of Pyongyang to locate worthwhile targets

'Numerous encounters with these jets in late November prove that we have to observe certain rules when playing tag. We have continued to play the "You can't touch me!" game with the MiGs into early December, and so far our F-80s have been doing alright, scoring a few hits on the super-fast fighter. Everyone has been delighted to learn that our American F-86 fighters are on the way and will soon be in action against enemy intruders.'

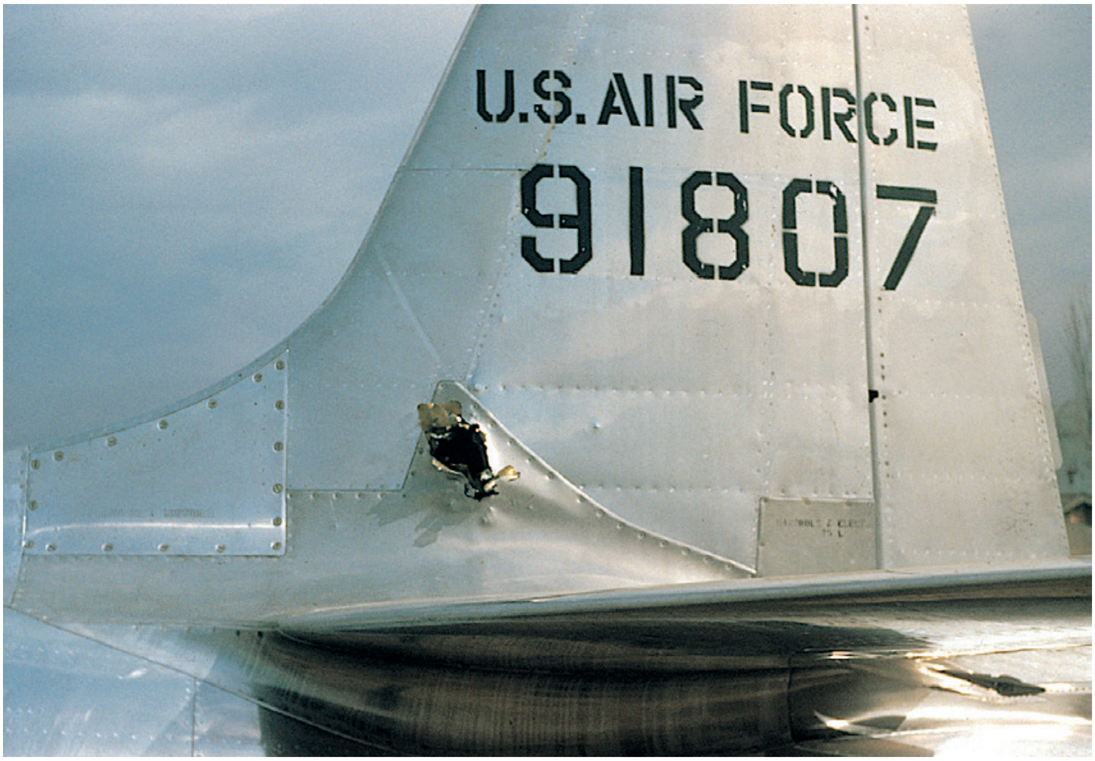
Although fighter-bomber pilots acknowledged the ever-growing MiG-15 threat, AAA still posed the greatest hazard to their wellbeing, and this would remain the case throughout the Korean War. During November, for example, three of the four F-80s lost by the 80th FBS fell victim to groundfire, either being hit by it or crashing while trying to avoid it – three pilots were killed. The only one to survive was 1Lt Boris Petcoff, whose close brush with death was detailed in the diary by 1Lt Robertson;

'On 30 November we were instructed to target flak batteries defending a bridge that crossed the Yalu River near the city of Manp'ojin. When we were getting into position at 7000 ft to make our run, I saw the flak bursting all around us – I guess it was on this mission that I first felt properly scared. The aircraft of my wingman, 1Lt Boris Petcoff, was hit in one of its fuel tanks, starting a small fire. He turned away and climbed to 22,000 ft, after which he ran out of fuel and glided down toward friendly lines. As he was about to land, he clipped the top of a small hill with one of his wings and wrapped his plane up in a ball when it crashed to the ground. Despite the total destruction of his fighter, he somehow got out of the cockpit alive!'

RF-80s charged with keeping an eye on MiG numbers at Antung – and providing post-strike photography of targets in the northwest corner of North Korea – were usually guaranteed some form of response from the resident fighters based there, so the unarmed photo-reconnaissance aircraft were always provided with a fighter escort. This task was exclusively undertaken by the F-80C prior to the arrival of the F-86. Just before noon on 14 December 1950, 1Lt Joseph Olshefski of the 7th FBS was leading a flight of four Shooting Stars as escort for a lone RF-80 taking post-strike photographs. Olshefski subsequently recalled;

'It was obvious that a large number of MiGs were getting airborne to take out the RF-80, and when they headed directly south across the Yalu in our direction, I ordered the RF-80 to return to base. We stayed with the photo-recce jet until it crossed the Chonchon River, after which we headed north again to form a barrier between the MiGs and the RF-80. We didn't have much trouble finding the enemy fighters because there were 24 of them! There were four elements of four and the remaining aircraft were in elements of two.

'We immediately went into a circle at 16,000 ft, staying close together and protecting each other's tail. The MiGs soon got tired of fooling around with us and made a diving attack, which started a "rat race". Planes were then all over the place. We traded spots, with the F-80s on the MiGs' tails and then vice-versa. 2Lt Robert F Otondo claimed that the MiGs made at least one firing pass at us, but they scored no hits. They were trying to lure us across the Yalu River into their territory. I finally got into a position to get one of them, firing a couple of rounds into him and seeing some



9th FBS/49th FBG F-80C 49-1807 was caught by a large-calibre AAA shell whilst on a strafing run at low-level in a valley – the gun was sited on the side of the valley wall. Hitting the aircraft squarely in the vertical stabiliser, the shell passed through the F-80 without causing any irreparable damage. The F-80 made it safely back to Taegu AB, where the jet was repaired in time to participate in missions flown the following day. 49-1807 was lost on 1 March 1951 when it suffered engine failure on take-off and crashed

good hits on his wing and fuselage. He quickly got out of the picture. Moments later 2Lt Otondo also briefly fired at one of the MiGs, scoring some hits, but not enough to bring it down. The enemy fighters then immediately made a fast exit back into Manchuria, and that was the end of our 24-v-4 duel.

'The next day, several newspapers carried the headline "Massive air battle over North Korea between 24 MiG-15s and four F-80s – the largest jet battle of the war". The situation was now rapidly getting to the point where we would not be able to handle the MiGs. Fortunately, the 4th FIG was now only days away from entering the war. The unsuspecting MiGs were in for a surprise.'

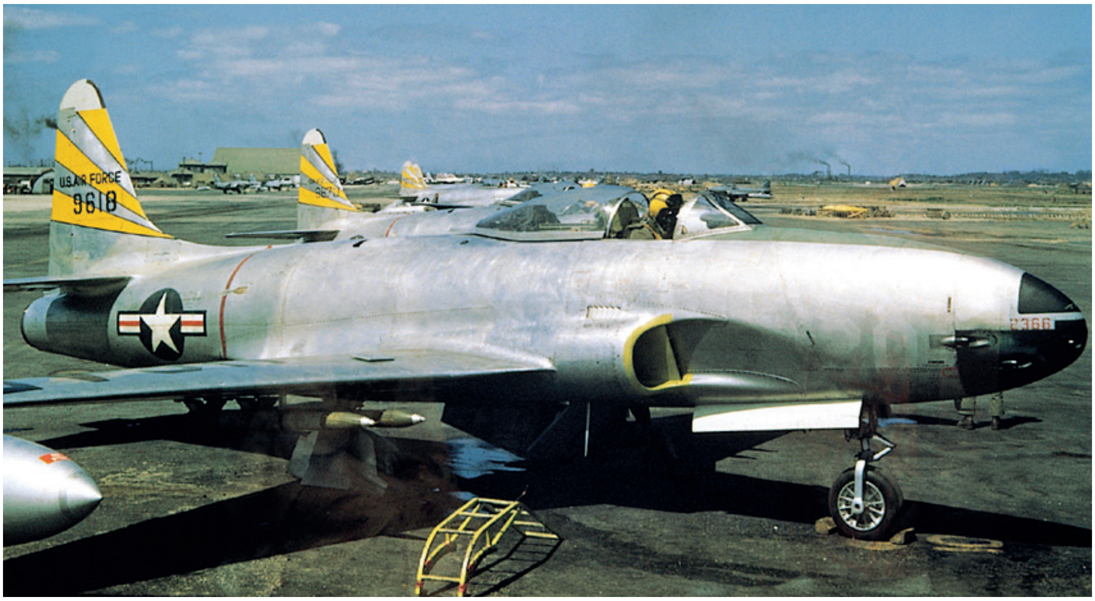
The next day, another flight of four F-80s – again led by 1Lt Joseph Olshefski – tangled with ten MiG-15s close to the Yalu River. The engagement commenced at 0920 hrs over the town of Namsi, 20 miles southeast of the border city of Sinuiju. 'I got close enough to open fire', Olshefski recalled, 'and I saw my rounds hit the wing and fuselage. Neither side lost any aircraft, and the dogfight lasted nearly 20 minutes. We again met at 16,000 ft.'

Maj Gen Earle E Partridge told the press on 15 December that the MiGs 'are getting more and aggressive, and it is only a matter of time before they will start falling'. Two days later, a Kimpo-based detachment from the 4th FIG gave the F-86A its combat debut over the Yalu River, resulting in Lt Col Bruce Hinton (detachment CO) claiming the aircraft's first MiG kill. From then on F-80 pilots would struggle to achieve aerial victories as the Sabres took the fight to the MiG-15. Indeed, only three more aircraft (all MiG-15s, downed in 1951) were credited to Shooting Star pilots during the war.

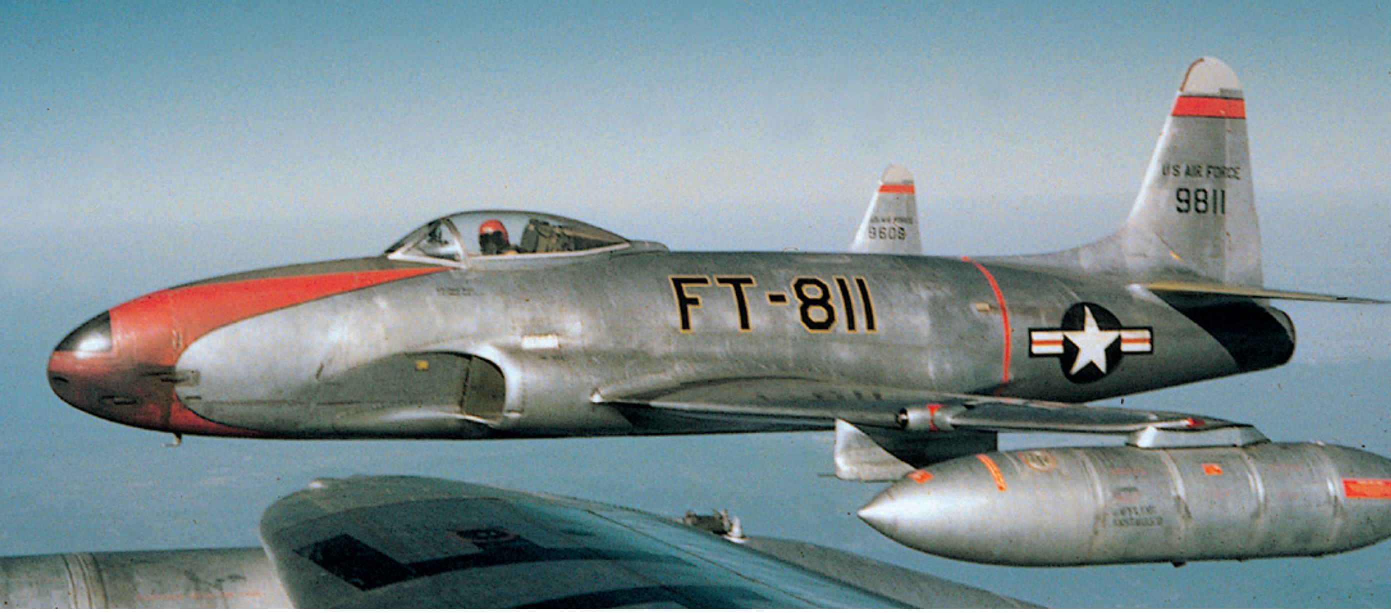
Although not actively seeking MiG-15s to engage in combat, the communist fighters were frequently encountered when F-80 pilots were searching for targets near the Yalu River. Tank columns heading south were a particular favourite – so much so that they usually travelled at night in order to avoid being hit by napalm-armed Shooting Stars. Such convoys, numbering six to eight T-34s, were invariably to be found north of Pyongyang, putting them squarely in the middle of MiG territory. Here, 16th FIS pilot 1Lt Carl Ebneter recalls such a mission flown in early 1951 shortly after his unit had fled Kimpo for Itazuke;

'At the time, we were flying out of a base in Japan, and a normal day was take off before daylight to try and catch Chinese tanks and vehicles still moving behind the line and, after using up all our ordnance, land at Taegu to refuel and rearm. We would then head back north to the Yalu River to make another run on their supply routes, before getting just enough gas at Taegu to make it back to Itazuke.

'On one mission five of us were approaching the Yalu when we saw eight MiGs heading towards us with a considerable height advantage. They made a shallow pass over us, dropping their external tanks through our formation. They then pulled up and commenced a steep dive on us, at which point someone in the flight asked over the radio "Do you think they are about to attack?" We immediately salvoed our external tanks and turned into the MiGs as they approached. The enemy pilots would usually break off rather than risk being hit by our 0.50-cals in a head-on pass. Although we were able to outturn a MiG, we could not out-climb or outrun one. After a short period of sparring, the MiGs broke off and returned north. Glad to call it a draw, we immediately turned south and descended back down to the deck, hitting more supply routes on the way home.'



Head down in the cockpit of F-80C 49-618, an 80th FBS pilot makes his final cockpit checks prior to taxiing out on a CAS mission in early 1951. His jet is armed with just four five-inch HVARs and 0.5-calibre ammunition due to the fact that he is flying from Itazuke, rather than a base in Korea. 49-618 was written off in a crash-landing at Taegu on 23 May 1951 while still assigned to the 80th FBS



CHAPTER FOUR

WAR OF ATTRITION

Devoid of ordnance beneath its port wing and with gun powder staining around the nose-mounted 0.50-cal weapons, F-80C 49-811 heads back to Taegu in July 1951. This shot was taken during one of the last missions flown by the 9th FBS with the Shooting Star. 49-811, which had actually served with the 16th FIS/51st FIG during the first months of the war, was transferred to the 36th FBS/8th FBG in August 1951 and survived the war

During the first six months of the war, the UN's air arm in Korea had done all it could to wipe out the NKPAF and, with the introduction of the F-86, field a fighter that was capable of matching the MiG-15 in the hotly disputed skies over the Yalu River. Its heavy and medium bombers, ably supported by myriad fighter-bombers, had inflicted huge casualties on the NKPA and the PVA, as well as devastating military, industrial and transportation targets in North Korea. Nevertheless, the situation on the ground looked bleak.

More than one million Chinese troops were estimated to be on Korean soil by 1 January 1951, and they had defeated all attempts by UN forces to stabilise the frontline. In the air, FEAF F-51s and F-80s escalated their efforts against the PVA and their main supply routes. Although the ultimate goal of all fighter pilots was to 'bag' a MiG-15, for 'mud-moving' types flying the Shooting Star, catching a train out in the open during daylight was almost as good. Unfortunately, these targets also became increasingly scarce as the war progressed, with trains usually running only after dark.

The night-flying B-26s were the high scorers when it came to knocking out locomotives, although F-80 pilots were willing to take great risks to get down low enough to skip-bomb the tunnels that they often hid in during the day. They became very successful at this tactic, the intricacies of which are explained here by 8th FBS pilot 1Lt Budd Butcher;

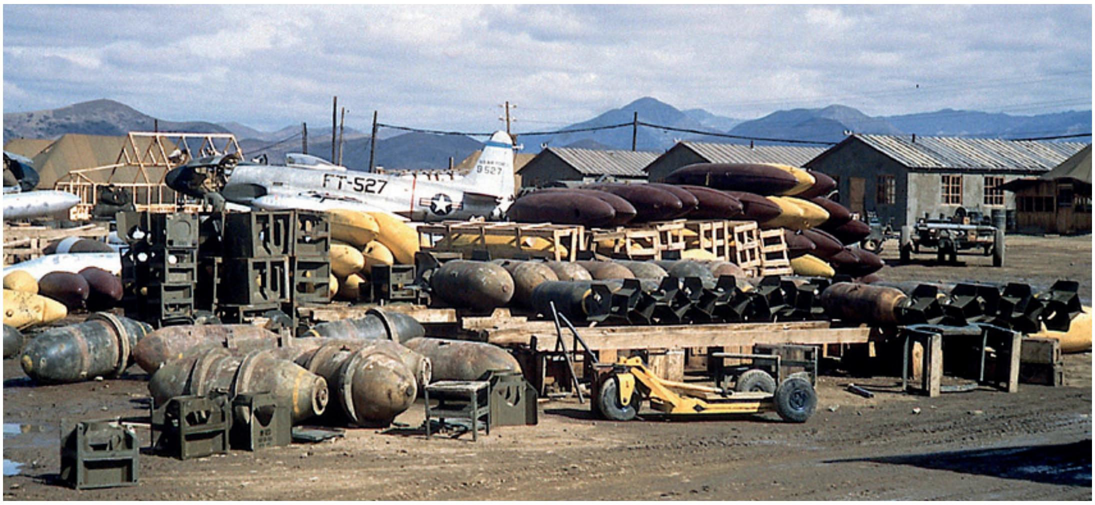
‘Train-busting was our favourite interdiction mission! Not only did it do considerable damage to the communist war effort, it was downright fun to “blow up an engine”, stop the train and then work over the rail cars, which were normally full of supplies and munitions. At times, the secondary explosions were extremely spectacular. However, train-busting was not without great risk to a pilot’s wellbeing! Flak guns were always placed at various locations along the train. Within seconds of coming under attack, the sides of some cars would drop down, giving the AAA gunners an unobstructed field of fire.

‘In March 1951, I led a flight of three F-80Cs on a dawn armed reconnaissance patrol in search of targets of opportunity. Supply trains were at the top of our priority list. Arriving in the target area just as the sun came up was critical, for it was the only way to catch trains before they hid in the tunnels for the day. I spotted a long freight (ammo supply) train near Sonchon, its driver going as fast as he could in an effort to reach the sanctuary of a nearby tunnel. He didn’t make it! I managed to blow up the engine on the first pass, stopping his forward progress. It amazed me what six 0.50-in guns could do! As soon as this happened, the train’s entire complement of AAA opened up on us, making the task all the more interesting. The three of us worked over the rail cars until our ammo was exhausted.

‘We got quite a few spectacular secondary explosions from the cars, as well as neutralising the AAA. I called for more flights to come in and finish off the train. It was a very rewarding mission, which earned me my first DFC.’

It was unusual for fighter-bombers to catch a train moving after first light, so pilots had to become proficient at skip-bombing a 500-lb device,

The open-air armoury at Taegu in May 1951 was stocked with 250- and 500-lb bombs and fin kits, along with empty napalm canisters. These weapons were destined for loading under the wings of F-80Cs from the 7th FBS, including 49-527 in the background having the magazines for its 0.50-calibre machine guns replaced. Transferred to the 35th FBS/8th FBG several months after this photograph was taken, the fighter-bomber survived the war and was sold to the Uruguayan air force in June 1958



OPPOSITE
8th FBS pilots pose for the camera prior to climbing into their respective cockpits at the start of another mission in the spring of 1951. Aside from the yellow P-1 'bone domes', these aviators are wearing clothing and flight gear that would have been familiar to aircrew from World War 2. With the majority of missions being undertaken by flights of four aircraft, most informal group shots taken during the Korean War consisted of a quartet of pilots – the individual seen here on the extreme left is 1Lt Budd Butcher

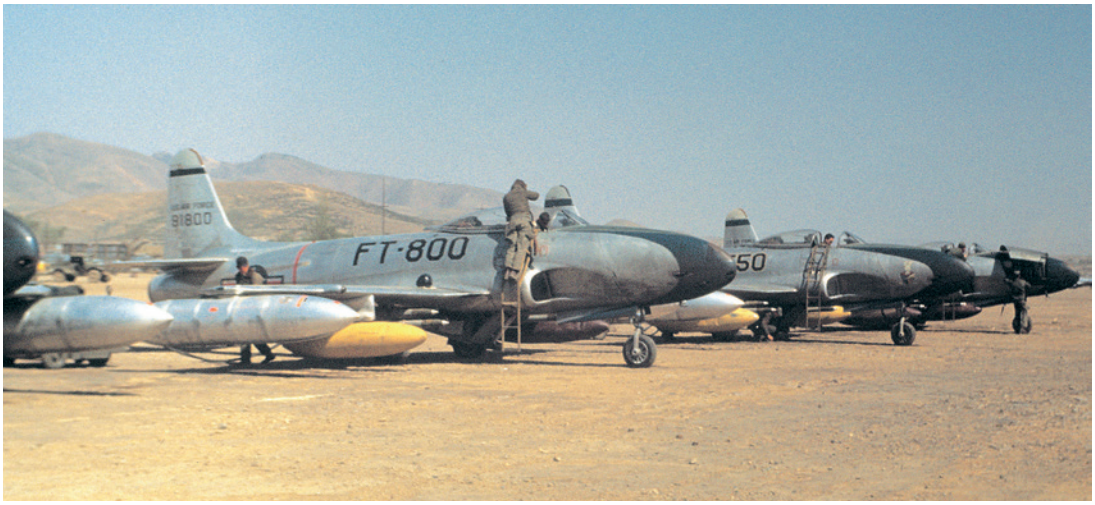
fitted with a delayed-action fuse, into a train tunnel. This proved to be a lot harder than it looked, for the tunnels were obviously located in mountainous terrain, which in turn made them difficult to approach at the appropriate angle for bomb release.

1Lt Randall R Renken of the 8th FBS was tasked with hitting rail targets in early 1951, leading a flight of F-80s on a line-cutting mission to Sunchon, deep in North Korea;

'It was a rare perfect day, the weather being clear and there were no clouds in the sky. When we got to the target area, the enemy started throwing up flak. Undeterred, we confidently peeled off and went in on the railway line in trail. When we had started our bomb runs, it was a nice long stretch of track gleaming in the sun. Four of our eight bombs directly hit the rails, with the remaining four barely missing – they heavily damaged the track bed. When we had finished dropping our bombs, we circled back around to survey the damage. What we saw was a string of pock marks surrounded by twisted rails and shattered timber. This was one of the most successful missions we flew. Everything went off smoothly, none of us suffered battle damage and we had achieved an almost perfect score.'

By mid-January 1951, both the 8th FBG and the 51st FIG had evacuated airfields in Korea and returned to Japan as the Chinese offensive rolled southward. The 49th FBG was the last of the F-80-equipped units to depart, although it left a small detachment behind at Taegu to refuel and rearm aircraft from all three Shooting Star groups right up until the airfield fell (along with bases at Seoul and Osan) in the third week of January.

By then, groundcrews at Taegu could turn an F-80 around in as little as 45 minutes. Indeed, the techniques used by the 49th were so refined that most of the F-80s staging out of the airfield could complete three missions a day. They would fly the initial strike from Tsuiki and then land at Taegu to rearm and refuel, undertake a second strike from there and then return once again to the Korean airfield prior to completing a third strike and flying back to Japan. Thanks to the hard work of the Taegu personnel, most of the F-80 squadrons were able to complete 700-plus missions each in the weeks prior to the capture of the airfield.



The key to the F-80's effectiveness once the PVA entered the war was its ability to be turned around quickly between missions, which duly allowed pilots to fly as many sorties as groundcrew could support. These fighter-bombers from the 7th FBS have been rearmed with napalm and rockets at Taegu for their afternoon mission against suspected troop concentrations in April 1951. 49-1800 was transferred to the 36th FBS/8th FBG when the 49th FBG switched to F-84Es in the summer of 1951. It was written off in a hard landing at Suwon on 11 September that same year while still serving with the 36th FBS

On 22 January, shortly after the PVA had captured the city of Wonju, 90 miles southeast of Seoul, the Chinese offensive stalled during the battles of Wonju and Chipyong-ni. With Gen Matthew Ridgway's Eighth Army, supported by other UN forces, holding the line, the fighter-bombers unleashed more devastation on communist troops than they had endured since early December.

Having been transferred to the 8th FBS just after it had returned to Japan, Capt 'Jack' Broughton (who later flew F-105 Thunderchiefs in Vietnam) first saw combat in late January as the FEAF generated as many sorties as it could in support of the Eighth Army;

'The Chinese were never short of manpower, and you would see the troops and their supply trains trudging into position for the next wave of assaults. When you attacked, some of them fell and others just blew up, and when you had cleared the dirt roads and fields of them, you knew that particular bunch wouldn't cause our grunts any more problems.'

The 80th FBS (which had rejoined the 8th FBG following its evacuation from Kimpo shortly before Christmas Day) was in the vanguard of these missions, and 1Lt John Robertson concisely summed up the unit's efforts with this entry for January 1951 in its unofficial combat diary;

'The Chinese push had been slowed down by now and a full scale assault from the air came as a welcome relief to the foot soldier when our flights hit a high peak for the past few months. Flying as many as 50 missions a day for our squadron, the pace was terrific. Only 25 minutes could be spent in the target area with the heavy loads we carried, but expert navigation and experience paid off in results.'

Aside from myriad ground attack missions, F-80 units still occasionally flew fighter sweeps during the early months of 1951. Of course the 4th FIG was the primary fighter unit in-theatre, but its F-86s were spread very thinly at this time as there was not available space on the airfields in Korea to support all three squadrons within the group. This meant that at least one unit had to remain back in Japan.

The 4th did its best to take on the MiGs, while still maintaining a protective umbrella over the large formations of fighter-bombers that were flying up into 'MiG Alley' on a daily basis. This often left B-29 formations tasked with performing strategic bombing raids against industrial targets deep within North Korea without dedicated fighter cover. Reverting to one of their pre-war missions, F-80 units duly stepped into the breach to fly bomber escort, although they proved only marginally successful in this role due to the jet's excessive fuel consumption. By the time pilots had set up a defensive screen above the bombers, their Shooting Stars were already running low on fuel, and if the B-29s were behind schedule the fighters would have

Taking a moment to relax for the camera, Capt 'Jack' Broughton leans against the wing of fully armed 8th FBS F-80C 49-844 at Taegu in the early spring of 1951. Broughton would later become one of the most respected F-105 pilots to see action in the Vietnam War, writing the acclaimed autobiographical volumes *Thud Ridge* and *Going Downtown*. Although Broughton survived his combat tour in Korea, 49-844 did not – the fighter-bomber crashed on take-off from Taegu on 11 May 1951

Not all battle-damaged F-80s made it back to base. F-80C 49-1862 of the 80th FBS sustained numerous AAA hits during a napalm pass on a target near Hongchon on 26 February 1951. The aircraft was seen to disintegrate in flight by other pilots on the mission, killing squadron intelligence officer 1Lt Ray J Van Den Beldt. The wreckage of the Shooting Star was subsequently found by advancing US Army troops a few days later

to head back to base before the bombers had even arrived at the rendezvous point.

The worst example of this occurred in early March 1951when 18 B-29s ran into a headwind. By the time they reached the target area, 22 F-80s had already been forced to head home. Left with just a handful of covering fighters, the bombers were set upon by nine MiG-15s, which succeeded in badly damaging ten of them. Indeed, three were in such poor shape that they crash-landed at bases in South Korea. Not long after this B-29s switched to night operations, which did not require fighter escorts.

A UN counteroffensive in March saw Seoul (and nearby Kimpo AB) and Taegu liberated. The PVA attempted to retake the city three weeks later, its ranks bolstered with thousands of fresh troops. However, the British Army's Gloucestershire Regiment, with UN reinforcements, successfully defended the city. The PVA had been steadily pushed north of the 38th Parallel by early April, and on the 22nd of that month it launched a spring offensive with 27 divisions and 260,000 troops along a 40-mile front north of Seoul. The resulting battle was the biggest – and the last – of the Korean War, UN forces managing to contain the offensive north of the South Korean capital. It was also the last time Chinese forces seriously tried to alter the frontline in Korea.

F-80s played a key role in blunting the spring offensive, flying both from bases in Japan and from recently recaptured Taegu and Kimpo. Again, the 80th FBS found itself in the thick of the action, flying 660 missions in March and 864 in April. On many of these sorties pilots employed napalm, as 1Lt John Robertson noted in the unit's unofficial combat diary;

'Again, the 80th led the 8th Group with the highest operational efficiency this month. 864 sorties for another record. The 3,000,000th gallon of napalm for the entire war effort was dropped by Capt Chenault on the town of Kaesong, Korea, marking a milestone in this new type of weapon for aircraft. Bet there was a "hot time" in the old town that nite [sic]! Our most reverent thanks to the man who invented the 90 gal napalm tank. A Godsend.'

80th FBS pilot Capt William R Yoakley became the latest member of the squadron to receive a DFC following his efforts during a road reconnaissance mission on 2 April, an account of his actions being noted in the citation that accompanied the award;

'Capt Yoakley did distinguish himself on a mission in April 1951 by outstanding leadership, personal courage and devotion beyond the call

Pilots in most squadrons became close friends during a combat tour in Korea, and the members of the 9th FBS were no exception. Here, they are seen posing for a squadron photograph at Taegu AB in July 1951 just prior to the unit switching to the F-84E. The base's dirt and gravel dispersal area created clouds of dust in the summer and then turned into a quagmire during the rainy season

of duty in connection with UN military operations against the Chinese and North Koreans in Korea. He led his flight of four F-80 type aircraft on an exceptionally successful armed reconnaissance mission in enemy territory.

'By skilful navigation, he led his flight to the target area and quickly discovered eight tanks and a number of self-propelled guns and enemy supplies camouflaged in a mountain pass north of Simwon-ni, Korea. Despite intense and accurate anti-aircraft and automatic weapons fire, which hit two aircraft in the flight, and disregarding his own personal safety, Capt Yoakley continued to attack the target aggressively, personally destroying one tank with a direct hit and damaging two others. This heroic display of leadership allowed the flight to destroy three large groups of supplies near the tanks and cause numerous losses to enemy troops. The excellent technique, extraordinary personal courage and aggressive leadership which Capt Yoakley displayed on this mission bring great honour to himself and to the United States Air Force.'

Yoakley's DFC was indeed well earned, for he had been forced to abandon an F-80 during a mission on 20 March, as noted in the unit's unofficial diary;

'Newton's law was quite emphatically demonstrated this month when Capt Yoakley tried to rearrange the top of a mountain in the Chosin Reservoir area. On an observation and gunnery pass on some troops near the reservoir, Yoakley "bounced" off the top of a mountain and managed to nurse his F-80 as far as Wonsan harbor before he bailed out over the water. A Navy helicopter picked him up immediately.'

MORE MiGs ... AND Po-2s

Although ground fire continued to pose the greatest threat to the F-80s during the spring of 1951 (13 F-80s fell to flak in April alone), the increasing number of MiG-15s appearing over North Korea also kept the Shooting Star pilots on their toes. 9th FBS CO Maj George Loving (who had claimed five aerial victories with the 31st FG during World War 2) had a close encounter with enemy jet fighters while leading four F-80s on an armed reconnaissance patrol near the Yalu River during April;

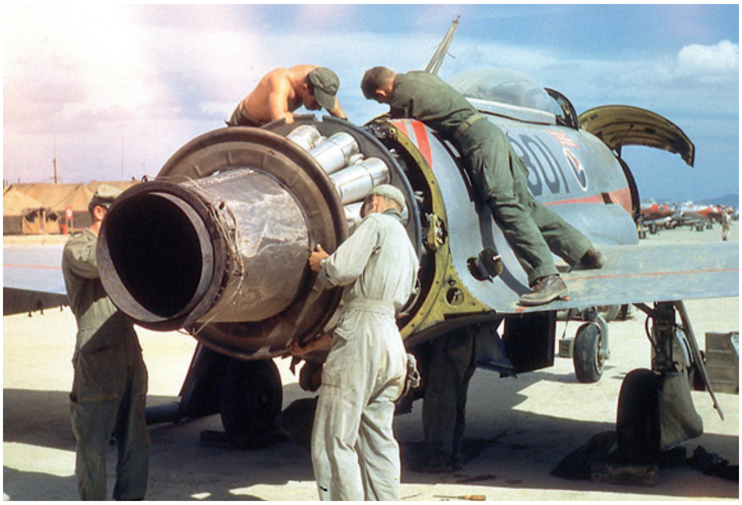
'This mission would take us into what could often be a hornet's nest – an area bristling with AAA in the heart of "MiG Alley". Aside from our six nose-mounted machine guns, each F-80 was armed with four five-inch rockets. We took off from Taegu and climbed up through overcast skies, eventually breaking out into the clear at 21,000 ft and then cruising northward at 22,000 ft. I planned to start our reconnaissance at Sinuiju, close to the Chinese border (370 miles from Taegu), and then work south in the direction of our base. The cloud cover disappeared near Pyongyang, and visibility was just about unlimited when I began our descent some 60 miles short of the target area.

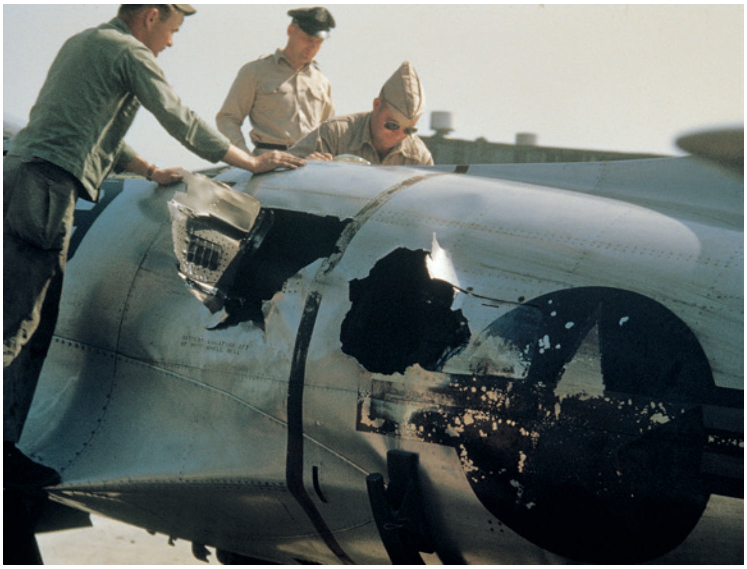
'I dropped down to tree-top level, and the other three trailed me at about 3000 ft. In short order I spotted a large group of trucks partially hidden beneath some trees alongside the road. I called them out as I passed overhead, and "Bully Able 3" and his wingman swooped in for a strafing attack. Normally, we made a single pass at targets in heavily defended areas, but this was the largest group of trucks I had seen. I wanted to finish them off, so I turned back with my wingman and we each made a strafing run, raking the line of trucks with hundreds of rounds of 0.50-calibre ammunition. We observed only spasmodic defensive fire, probably from rifles and machines guns. We left behind a dozen burning vehicles, all fully loaded with supplies for the Chinese troops.

'Further down the road, on the adjacent railway line, I spotted three railcars on a siding. These were tougher targets than trucks, and they would require rockets to destroy them. I instructed "Bully Able 3" to climb up to 8000 ft with his wingman to provide us with top cover. I assumed that the F-86s would be in the area to keep the MiGs occupied, but we needed cover just in case they weren't. At this point we moved down the road to Anju, which was only 70 miles from the MiG base at Antung. I couldn't, therefore, assume that MiGs in the air would be tied up with our F-86s.

'I had just let loose a fusillade of rockets and was dodging the resulting fireball from an exploding freight car when "Bully Able 3" radioed, "Four bogies approaching fast at 10,000 ft from the northeast". I questioned him as to whether these were F-86s and his response came seconds later – "They are MiG-15s". "Ables 3" and "4" then dove for the deck and departed the area. My wingman and I were outgunned, lacking in speed and at an inferior altitude. We would be the underdogs in this fight. I had been in a lot of dogfights in World War 2, and now I would see what the Chinese and Soviets had to offer. The big question in my mind was the turning capability of the F-80C versus that of the MiG-15. If we got into a turning fight, how would we make out? I didn't know, but the moment of truth was approaching.

'As the leader of "Bully Able" flight, I had my work cut out for me. I switched to the emergency radio channel and broadcast a warning. "This is 'Bully Able', MiG-15s sighted over Anju at 10,000 ft." I then radioed my wingman and told him I was jettisoning my tip tanks. I punched the tank-release button, pushed the throttle to the firewall, backed off a fraction so I would not lose my wingman, turned to the southeast and began a high-speed climb. Altitude could be converted into airspeed,


Maintenance personnel played a key role in keeping F-80s serviceable and mission-capable during the conflict. Their job was made no easier by austere conditions at the various airfields occupied by fighter-bomber groups once in Korea, not to mention extremes in weather, high mission tempo and routine shortages of spare parts. Fortunately, the Shooting Star was straightforward to work on, and, as this photograph of Suwon-based 49-801 from the 25th FIS clearly shows, the entire rear fuselage and tail aft of the wing could be removed to allow easy access to the J33-A-35 turbojet engine



Getting jumped by MiG-15s while coming off a bomb run was commonplace for UN fighter-bomber pilots. This F-80 was hit by two 37 mm cannon rounds on the starboard side of its rear fuselage section, which in turn badly damaged the port side when they detonated. Nevertheless, the aircraft still made it back to base, allowing its unidentified pilot to complete his 98th mission. Scores of F-80s returned home with gaping holes in their wings and fuselages, proving the strength of the Lockheed fighter-bomber

and that was what we needed in any manoeuvring situation. My strategy was to keep working toward the southeast in the direction of our home base and away from Antung.

'Far above, I saw two of the four MiGs roll into a dive. In the next few minutes we would have them spewing lead toward us. I would wait until just before they reached firing range and then turn sharply into them to spoil their aim. If we turned too soon, the MiGs could readjust their aim and hammer us. Turn too late and we could be blasted. Discipline and experience was what counted at this point.

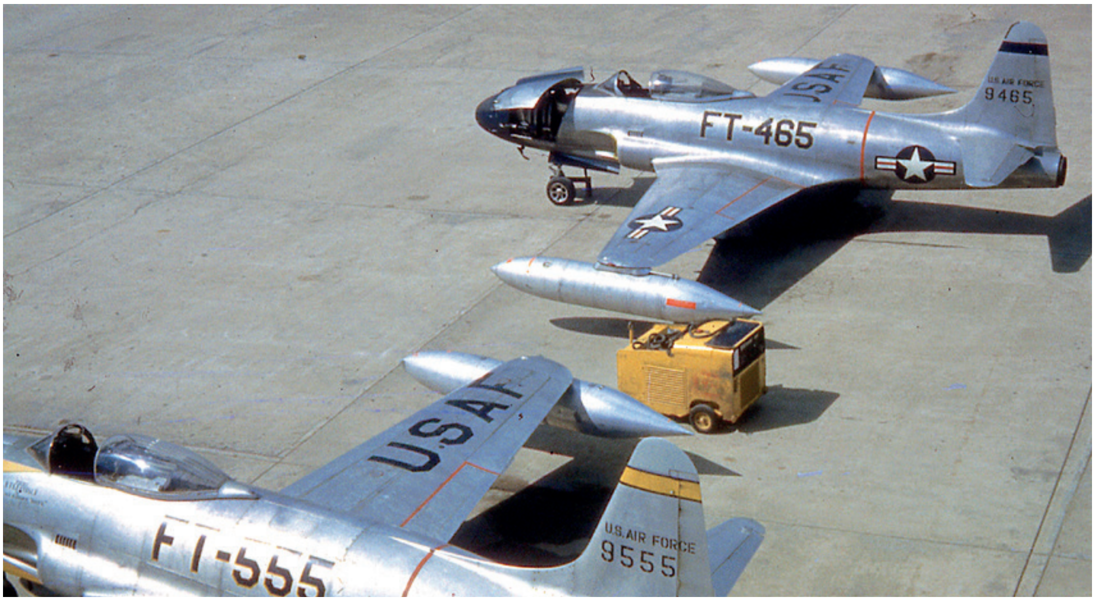
Down they came at a very steep angle and a lot of speed. As I waited for them to get closer, I thought "they'll never nail us with those tactics. They are too steep and too fast to hit the side of a barn." Seconds later I saw the muzzle flashes of the lead MiG's cannons. I called out "'Able 2', break right" and racked my F-80 around 180 degrees to confront the attackers.

'The MiGs broke off their attack and pulled up sharply. I followed suit, pulling the nose of my fighter in their direction in order to fling a long burst of 0.50-calibre rounds as the retreating MiGs zoomed back up in a steep climb. No blood! I knew that my burst of machine gun fire was likely to be a futile gesture given the distance involved, and pulling up sharply to get the MiGs in my gunsight bled off vital airspeed, but I couldn't accept the idea of engaging in a dogfight, even a one-sided tussle, without throwing some lead!

'The MiG leader and his wingman zoomed back up and rejoined the other two, at which point MiG Nos 3 and 4 came off their perch and headed downhill for an attack. It was a repeat of the first, being both very steep and very fast. Once again I called a right break, making a violent turn to face the attackers and spraying machine gun fire in their direction – no blood again! By this time I had lured the MiGs approximately 100 miles from their home base. However, if the harassing attacks had continued for much longer it would have been touch-and-go for us, given our dwindling fuel supply. Fortunately, a couple of minutes later, the MiGs turned northward, apparently low on fuel themselves.'

By the spring of 1951, the NKPAF's aerial threat consisted almost exclusively of two-seat Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes. These were increasingly used in the nocturnal harassment role as FEAF units started to move back to airfields in South Korea. The 49th FBG had been the first F-80-equipped group to fly back in from Japan, recommencing operations from Taegu on 24 February 1951. 8th FBS pilot 1Lt Budd Butcher was amongst those to experience the Po-2 threat firsthand at this time;

OPPOSITE
Lt Col Ben Warren, CO of the 16th FIS, takes time out to have his photograph taken with F-80C 49-795. Behind him, the maintenance crews are busy getting the battle-weary jet ready for yet another mission from Suwon in April 1951. Assigned to Capt H J Curran and bearing distinctive nose art and a growing mission tally, 49-795 was also destroyed in a take-off accident at Taegu (on 9 May 1951)



Battle-weary jets from the 49th FBG were sent back to Tsuiki AB, in Japan's Fukuoka Prefecture, for deep maintenance and major repairs. Having just been rolled onto the flightline for pre-delivery check flights, 49-555 of the 8th FBS and 49-465 of the 7th FBS bask in the spring sunshine in May 1951. Both fighter-bombers joined the 8th FBG several months later when the 49th FBG received F-84Es, with 49-555 surviving the conflict to serve with the 68th FS at Itazuke immediately post-war. 49-465, however, crashed in bad weather during a mission on 1 September 1952, its pilot, 1Lt Cecil H Clyott of the 36th FBS, being listed as Missing In Action

'These bi-wing trainer types quickly became a royal pain in the arse! Nicknamed "Bedcheck Charlie", they would arrive around midnight and drop a few small bombs [grenades]. During my time, they never hit a significant target, but they sure managed to interrupt our sleep! Slit trenches during the winter months in the middle of the night were not the most comfortable. A nightfighter must have got them eventually, because their harassment ceased after a while.'

Sometimes, the F-80 units would neutralise the Po-2 threat themselves. Although the Shooting Star's arsenal of weaponry remained virtually unchanged throughout the war, occasionally the targets for its bombs, rockets and napalm would be altered in order to counter an emerging enemy threat such as 'Bedcheck Charlie'. In the spring and early summer of 1951, the F-80 squadrons bombed some of the lesser known grass strips in North Korea that were deemed suitable for these aircraft to operate from. 2Lt George R Veazey of the 36th FBS remembers flying a few of these sorties;

'On some special missions we carried four 1000-lb bombs and no tip tanks, these weapons usually being dropped on the crude grass fields that could be used by "Bedcheck Charlie's" bi-wing Po-2s. They were constantly harassing our major bases by flying over at night and dropping grenades or small bombs. Our bombs on these missions were

Kansas Tornado
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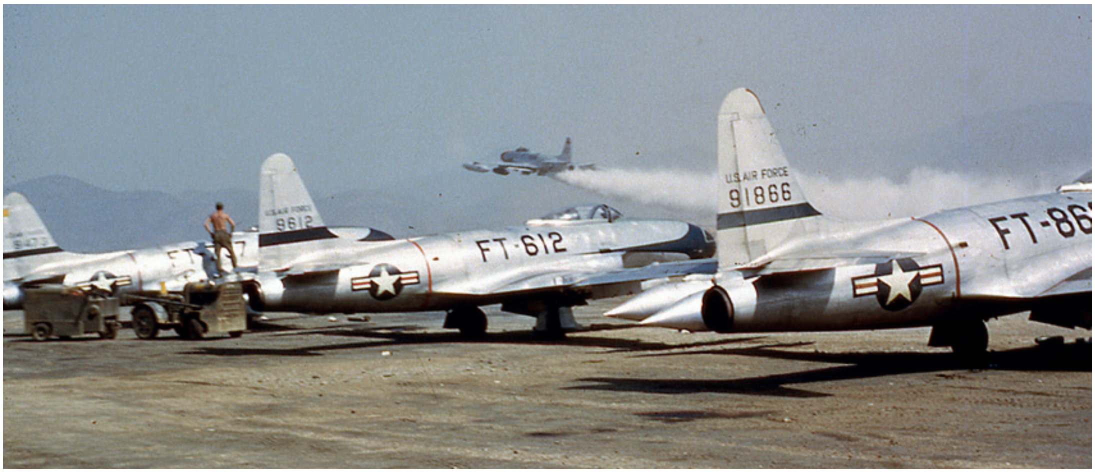


Laden down with 'Misawa' tip tanks, napalm canisters and five-inch HVARs, an F-80C from the 25th FIS takes off from Taegu with the aid of jettisonable JATO bottles in late April 1951. In the foreground are three storeless Shooting Stars from the 16th FIS. Both 49-612 and 49-1866 were lost the following month, with the former being shot down on 12 May (see the photograph of this aircraft in the previous chapter for details) and the latter destroyed in a fatal take-off accident at Suwon 11 days later

equipped with a combination of instant and time-delay fuses – some of the delays were up to 12 hours or more. The airfields were rendered inoperable by our attacks, and aircraft could only use them again after urgent repair work had been carried out. And this became a dangerous proposition thanks to the delayed-action fuses.'

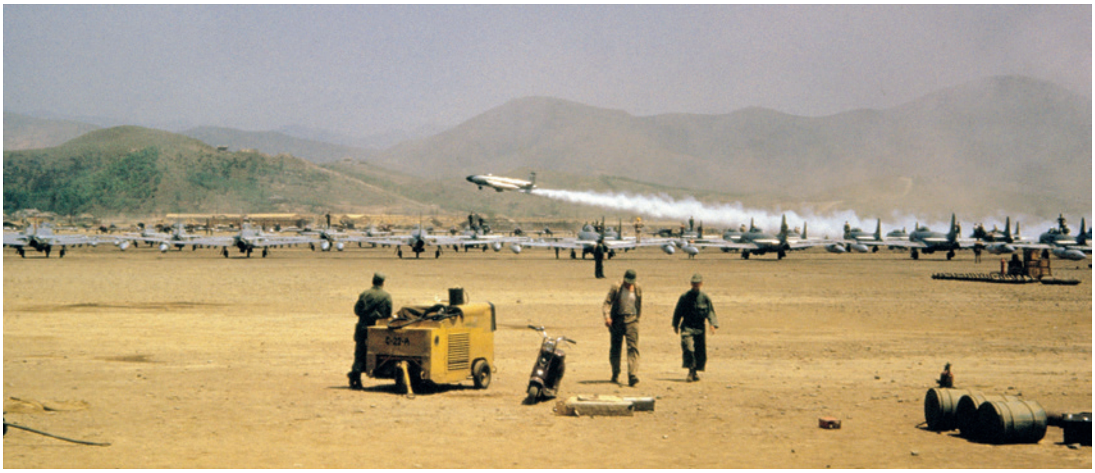
Amongst the airfields routinely attacked by Po-2s was Kimpo, which was home to the 8th FBG from 25 June 1951– exactly a year after the Korean War had started. In that time the group had been credited with destroying at least 45 enemy aircraft, 256 tanks, 1916 artillery positions, 4026 vehicles, 48 locomotives and 6026 buildings, and killing 14,684 enemy troops. The group would transfer to Suwon two months later, where it continued to be visited by 'Bedcheck Charlie'.

From June 1951 the number of F-80s in-theatre began to slowly decrease as more F-84 Thunderjets arrived to take their place – the Republic fighter had first seen combat in Korea in December 1950. The 49th FBG re-equipped with F-84Es one squadron at a time between June and September, with the surplus F-80s going to remaining units in the FEAF to make good the high attrition rates being suffered in the frontline. 1Lt James Hagenback was one of the pilots who transitioned from the Shooting Star to the Thunderjet with the 49th FBG;

'The F-80 was so well liked by the pilots that it was only with reluctance that we transitioned to the F-84. During the aircraft swap over we routinely sent mixed flights of F-80s and F-84s to Korea from Tsuiki, and these missions revealed the principal differences between the two types. The F-84s needed JATO bottles in order to take off during the hot summer months, which left a great cloud of smoke hanging over the runway after a noisy flight of Thunderjets had "hit the blue" carrying just one 500-lb bomb apiece beneath their bellies. Later, when the smoke cleared, a flight of F-80s carrying rockets, napalm or two 500-lb bombs, and equipped with heavy long-range tip tanks, would taxi out and take off with little problem.'

1Lt Edward Fernandes of the 51st FIG also rated the F-80 over the F-84;

'Compared to the Thunderjet, the Shooting Star was a sweetheart on take-off. I never had to use JATO on an F-80 at Suwon. Water alcohol was sufficient, even in the height of summer. The water alcohol would



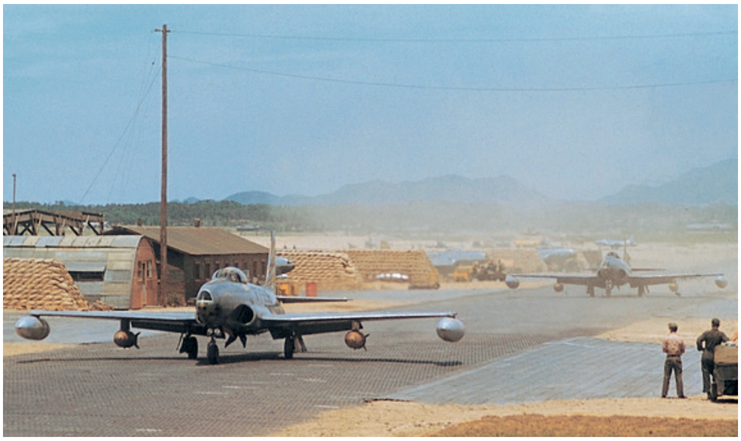
Thrust aloft partially by the boost provided by its JATO bottles, this 7th FBS F-80C is seen departing Taegu at the start of a major strike against Sinuiju in May 1951. Several weeks later the unit traded in its war-weary F-80s for new F-84Es, with all of the Shooting Stars visible here being transferred to the 49th FBG

give out just as you reached flap-up speed of 160 mph, which caused the pilot to have his heart beat a little faster, to increase pitch attitude about ten degrees and to slowly milk up the flaps.'

49th FBG pilot Capt 'Jack' Broughton of the 8th FBS did on occasion use JATO bottles during large-scale strikes from Taegu in the summer in 1951;

'Now and then Fifth Air Force would decide that it was time for a mass strike, and they would assemble a maximum effort of a couple of groups at Taegu. They would invariably position a group (F-80s and F-51s) at each end of the runway during the hottest time of the day, our aircraft loaded with more munitions and fuel than we could comfortably get airborne with from the short PSP strip. JATO bottles were strapped onto the F-80s and everybody on the ground was told to stand clear! The group penalised by having the tailwind behind them would take off first, and the pilots strapped into aircraft at the opposite end of the runway would brace for the ensuing terror show of aborting F-51s or F-80s, burning brakes, jettisoned bombs, tanks and JATO bottles tumbling toward them, and, on occasion (two times), fatally flamed-out and crashing Shooting Stars. It was utterly scary, and the combined strike targets were usually North Korean cabbage gardens.'

The 80th FBS flew a lot of missions with its aircraft loaded in the configuration seen here on two F-80Cs rolling along a PSP taxiway at a hot and dusty Suwon in the summer of 1951. The 1000-lb GP bomb proved most effective against deep bunkers or railway marshalling yards, both of which required substantial craters to be made into the earth to have any telling effect on the enemy



PERILS OF PSP

The 51st FIG (which continued to fly F-80s until switching to F-86Es from November 1951) had started operating a growing detachment of aircraft from Suwon, southwest of Seoul, in May. The group kept its maintenance and supply elements at Tsuiki, however, due to the austere nature of the facilities at Suwon.

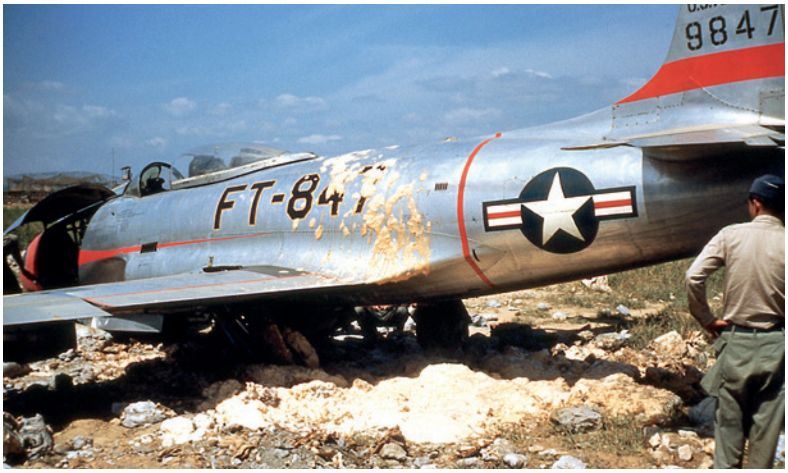
In order to return the airfield to operability as quickly as possible following its recapture, FEAF engineers laid miles of PSP to cover bombed taxiways and runways. Keeping it in serviceable condition proved to be a time-consuming job for groundcrews, as the weight of an F-80 when loaded with fuel, napalm and/or 500- or 1000-lb bombs would curl up the ends of the interlocked PSP. This in turn posed a serious hazard for a heavy Shooting Star during its take-off run, for as the jet accelerated down the runway it would 'rock' just enough for a low-slung tip tank to be ripped open when it hit a curled-up end of PSP. With highly flammable fuel streaming from the tank, the pilot would have to fly to a safe area and drop his intact – and full – tip tank before he lost control of the jet when the holed one ran dry.

PSP was also very hard on the nose wheel tyre, with punctures being a routine occurrence. Nose gear legs also occasionally snapped due to excessive wear. According to the 51st FIG's 1Lt Edward Fernandes, 'Taxiing an F-80 on a rough PSP taxiway while carrying 1000-lb bombs or napalm on the mid-wing pylons was exciting. The armament cleared the runway by only a few inches, and as you bounced along the bombs would scrape the PSP, causing a flurry of sparks. Sometimes, we had the 51st's chief rabble-rousers to take our minds off the bouncing bombs. Lt Col Brock, army liaison officer, and "Doc" Baumgard, our flight surgeon, were known to drive a Jeep alongside the runway, waving and giving us the finger, and receiving the same in return.'

Although the 51st FIG started to wind down F-80 operations from November 1951, the 8th FBG soldiered on with the Shooting Star. In the forefront of the action during the second half of 1951 was the 80th FBS, which had of course been temporarily attached to the 51st during the autumn and early winter of 1950. Flying from Kimpo, the 80th had completed 10,827 combat sorties by December 1951.

The squadron's 1Lt Jerry Minton, who flew a number of these missions during the late summer and early autumn of 1951, provides details on the optimum bomb fusing employed by the 80th in order to ensure maximum damage;

In September 1951 F-80C 49-847 of the 25th FIS suffered battle damage that adversely affected the aircraft's hydraulics, preventing the pilot from deploying the flaps for landing. The jet ran off the runway at Suwon, its brakes glowing red hot to the point that they were smoking. The fighter-bomber quickly stopped when it struck rocks in the run off area at the end of the runway, its landing gear being damaged in the process. The Suwon fire crew doused the smouldering F-80 upon reaching the scene, and the aircraft was soon recovered and repaired. It survived the war to be sold to the Chilean air force



OPPOSITE
Crew chiefs help pilots strap into their rearmed and refuelled F-80Cs on the 80th FBS flightline (made of PSP matting) at Suwon in September 1951, these jets having already completed a morning mission. They are seen here about to taxi out at the start of the noon push, and third and fourth missions could be flown depending on the operational tempo. The latter was dictated by whether the PVA was massing for an offensive along the frontline

'The fuses on the bombs were usually set at three seconds delay to allow penetration after impact, but as I recall on certain types of targets – railway lines, ridges and, occasionally, airfields – delays of up to 72 hours were mixed into the group load. Our primary objective here was to impair enthusiasm, morale and labour management among the repair crews.

'I remember one mission where we flew down a railroad track one at a time attempting to "skip" our "thousand pounders" into two rail tunnels. One pilot put one in each tunnel on his first pass and the rest of us bounced and blew bombs everywhere. On another mission, flown at night solo, I was instructed to take out a searchlight battery. When a searchlight locked onto you, your head was down and you had to rely on instruments. If your head was up, you were immediately blinded, and that made you totally ineffective when it came to strafing and bombing.'

35th FBS pilot 1Lt Robert E Allen, who had flown B-24 Liberators in World War 2, completed his tour with the squadron in the autumn of 1951. For his 100th mission he led a three-ship of F-80s tasked with cutting enemy railway tracks near Kunu-ri – a communications and rail hub in South Pyongan Province. Each of the aircraft carried two 500-lb bombs, plus a full load of 0.50-calibre rounds for the guns;

'After we did a lot of damage with our bombs, we zoomed down to an altitude of only 200 ft looking for something to expend our 0.50-cal ammo on. When we were south of Pyongyang, puffs of smoke appeared to the left side of the formation. These were 20 mm AAA shells – "flaming golf balls" – that passed through the flight.'

Seconds later, 1Lt Allen heard a sound like the crack of a baseball bat and felt a slight jar throughout his aircraft. An acrid smell of burned cordite soon filled the cockpit. His aircraft had been hit in the nose by an exploding shell. Gingerly testing the controls of his damaged fighter, Allen was glad to see that the F-80 responded to his experienced touch just as smoothly as it had when the aircraft had rolled off the Lockheed assembly line several years earlier.

Shortly thereafter, as they continued on their armed reconnaissance mission, he spotted 15 AAA emplacements. Leading his pilots away from the target, Allen then dived on the positions with the sun at his back – this obscured the gunners' view of the approaching attack. In one firing pass the three F-80 pilots knocked out ten of the gun positions. With their ammunition exhausted, Allen led his pilots south to an advanced strip just beyond the 38th Parallel. When asked by a *Stars & Stripes* reporter about the damage inflicted to his aircraft, he replied, 'I was a perfect target, but he was leading me too much. He fired a perfect broadside but missed me – except for one hit.'

2Lt Clarence Hoggard of the 36th FBS closely inspects the fuse and mounting lugs of a drag-inducing 1000-lb GP bomb attached to the starboard underwing stores pylon of his jet at Suwon in December 1951

CHAPTER FIVE

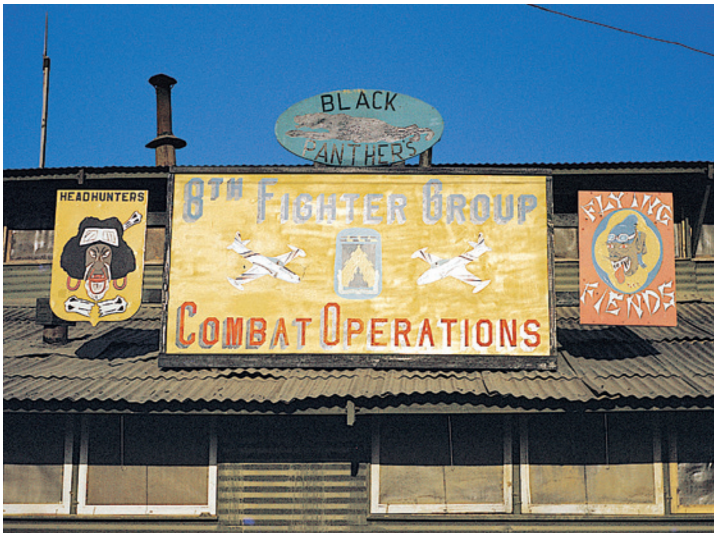
FIGHTING ON WITH THE 8th FBG

The heavy snows during the winter of 1952-53 had little effect on F-80 operations, with the 8th FBG continuing to put pressure on the Chinese truck convoys that were trying to take advantage of the inclement weather. These 36th FBS machines have been loaded with 1000-lb bombs in preparation for their next mission from Suwon. The groundcrew of *AVEMARIA* (49-749), which has had its canopy covered to protect it from the worst of the winter weather, would have swept the aircraft's wings clean of snow prior to the jet taxiing out of its revetment

Once the 'human waves' of Chinese troops had been stopped and the frontline began to stabilise somewhere around the 38th Parallel, little changed in terms of territorial gains for either side from the summer of 1951 through to the end of the Korean War in July 1953. Yet despite each day seeing virtually the same missions flown by the fighter-bomber units, the degree of danger associated with these sorties had increased dramatically.

Due to overwhelming air power exerted in-theatre by the UN air forces, the enemy had been forced to camouflage by day and move by night. Strictly day fighter-bomber units equipped with F-80s and F-84s relied on information passed to them by the night intruder crews (flying USAF B-26s and US Marine Corps nightfighters) in order to locate truck convoys that had gone into hiding for the day.

By January 1952 the 8th FBG had all three of its F-80 squadrons in-theatre at Suwon, while the 51st FIG had discarded its Lockheed fighters (and the ground attack role) in favour of the new F-86E Sabre. The 49th FBG had also given up its Shooting Stars, although it remained very much a fighter-bomber unit thanks to its re-equipment with F-84s.



It would have been hard to have missed the Combat Operations Center for the 8th FBG at Suwon. All three of the group's squadrons were represented on this sign, their colourful insignia reflecting lineage that could be traced back to the 1930s. The trio of fighter-bomber squadrons (all part of the 8th Fighter Wing/8th Operations Group) remain active today, flying F-16C Fighting Falcons with the Pacific Air Forces from three bases in South Korea

All of the units that had previously flown the F-80 had turned their aircraft over to the 8th FBG as they transitioned onto other aircraft types. This meant that despite the group suffering a relatively high attrition rate, it was usually able to sortie an impressive number of jets per mission. However, the strain of near-ceaseless combat had caused surviving airframes to deteriorate faster than they could be repaired. In 1952, Shooting Stars already required more routine maintenance for each hour flown than any other fighter serving in Korea, including the venerable F-51 Mustang. With no fighter types readily available to replace the F-80s in the 8th FBG, however, they would have to soldier on for more than a year.

Interdiction was the key to preventing the enemy from building up enough supplies to launch an offensive. Monitoring communist equipment levels was to prove difficult, however, for aviators rarely saw anything moving on the ground north of the frontline. One F-80 pilot remembers that when he flew over terrain south of the frontline much activity could be seen, with the roads busy with traffic heading in both directions. However, once he crossed into enemy territory, there was no sign of human life at all – this held true all the way up to the Yalu River.

When strikes were carried out against known communist airfields, there were never any aircraft or repair crews to be seen. However, every fighter-bomber pilot knew that these areas came alive with men and machinery after dark, so they carried out their missions just as they had planned.

Having suffered heavy losses during the first Chinese offensive of the war, USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACs) now rarely ventured beyond the frontline with UN scouting patrols. Nevertheless, from time to time they still managed to detect large concentrations of troops massing behind enemy lines, which indicated that there might be an attack launched against frontline positions. Here, 1Lt George Veazey of the 36th FBS recalls sorties where his unit was called in to take care of suspected enemy troop build-ups;

'We used a similar set-up with our ordnance when we targeted enemy troops massing for an attack or repair crews working on rail cuts. We would usually fly these missions on what was known as a "late-light recce". We each carried two 500-lb and four 250-lb bombs. The latter were fragmentation [frag] bombs with worn-out 0.5-inch machine gun barrels screwed into the nose of each device, and with an instantaneous fuse in the bomb's tail. The idea was that when the ordnance hit the target, fragments would be scattered over a wide radius at high speed, mowing down any personnel that were close by.

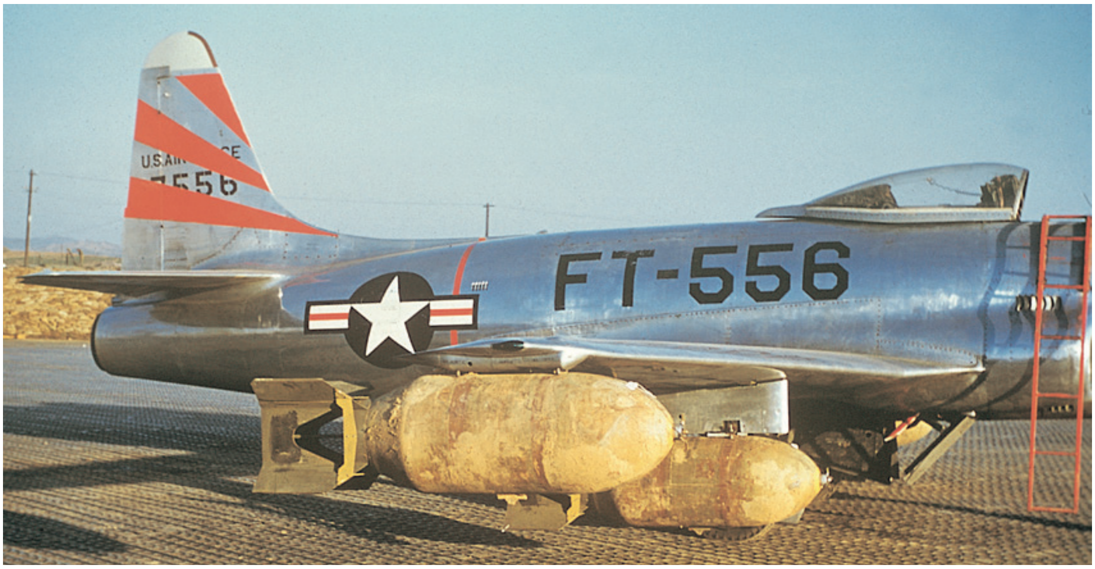
'Typically, we would fly north just before sunset and drop the 500-lb bombs on a key junction or road. We would then continue northward for a further 15 minutes, before returning to the point where we had initially dropped our ordnance. By then, road traffic would be jammed up waiting for the debris to be cleared, and at that point we would dive down and drop the frags. This snarled things up even more, greatly reducing the distance that the convoys would be able to travel that night. Any damaged or disabled vehicles that were still around at dawn were easy pickings for the early flights.'

By 1952, FEAF had learned that the communists could only get labourers back on the job of repairing road and rail links by threatening them with execution after so many of their comrades had been killed by late-detonating ordnance and frag bombs.

Flying myriad sorties every single day, it was inevitable that occasionally the aim of the F-80 pilots would be a little off. Indeed, anyone could have a bad day, and with AAA fire literally surrounding you on virtually every mission, it took nerves of steel to stay focused on the bombsight as the target loomed large. Many bombs that drifted off course and blew up harmlessly were put down to the inexperience, or momentary ineptitude, of the pilot. Here, 35th FBS pilot 1Lt Ed Skaggs recalls a mission in May 1952 where the bombs caused more damage by actually missing the designated target;

'We were on our way to the T-Bone Hill area [near Karhwagol] for a CAS mission [in support of the 20th Philippine Battalion Combat Team]. It was being coordinated by a T-6 "Mosquito" pilot. Before we hit the target area my radio went out, so I signalled for my No 3 to take over the flight lead.

'The "Mosquito" pilot marked the target with smoke rockets and the new flight leader rolled in on them. The balance of our flight orbited to see what the lead would do – if he took out the target, then we would divert to secondary targets in the area. No 3's bombs hit about 150 metres from



The F-80 was rarely seen bombed up in this configuration due to the jet's notoriously short range. However, when performing missions close to the frontline – officially titled the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) – that had a flying time of less than one hour, the Shooting Star was cleared to operate with its tip tanks replaced by two 1000-lb GP bombs. Such aircraft boasted a war load of 4000 lbs, with the 'thousand pounders' proving most effective against deeply-dug bunkers and ammunition dumps located immediately behind the frontline. 49-556 was assigned to the 36th FBS at Suwon in 1952-53 the marker, so we lined up to make our runs. However, before we could roll over and head down there was a tremendous secondary explosion! Lead had accidentally hit a hidden ammunition dump, and Chinese soldiers were scattering all over the place. The balance of the flight went in and expended its ordnance, shooting up everything in sight. We did a lot of damage on that mission!'

The Chinese were generally more interested in protecting their supply routes to the front than their troops. The primary reason for this was that most soldiers within close proximity of the frontline were dug in so deep that it would have been difficult for fighter-bombers to have inflicted any serious losses. However, the key rail lines, road junctions and tunnels were vulnerable to attack, and therefore had to be protected. This meant that each of these targets was surrounded by heavy-calibre AAA and numerous automatic weapons.

The density of these increased significantly from early 1952 onwards, thus heightening the risk posed to the fighter-bombers tasked with attacking these key targets. New approach tactics were quickly devised to increase the chances of mission survivability, these being adopted by F-51, F-80 and F-84 units. The new procedures called for the aircraft to enter the target area through the sector that offered the least resistance in terms of flak. Pilots then made a 90-degree turn towards the target flight by flight, releasing their bombs at a relatively high altitude (approximately 6000 ft) in order to allow them to immediately recover from their dive and instigate a sharp break away from the target area.

With formations of 12 or more aircraft, the first flight carried proximity-fused bombs for flak suppression. These would explode above the ground, causing maximum casualties amongst flak crews. When attacking in smaller numbers, only the first two aircraft carried this type of ordnance. The enemy soon became aware of these tactics, and the first few aircraft were allowed through to the target without opposition, while the later elements caught the full brunt of the flak defences. F-80 pilots countered this move by placing their proximity-fused bombs in the middle of the formation, allowing the first aircraft to do significant damage with their regular 500-lb GP (general purpose) bombs.

In several US government publications dating back to the mid-1950s, the final 18 months of the Korean War are referred to as having been a contest between the communist logistics corps and the UN fighter-bombers. The Chinese had large numbers of troops available to throw into the fight against UN forces, but they could not hope to gain any ground without ample quantities of supplies and ammunition to support a major offensive. Typically, within ten miles of the main line railway running south from China to the frontline, the communists would establish heavily camouflaged supply dumps in an effort to build up logistical support to a level where it could sustain a major offensive. These sites were rarely detected from the air, but when they were, a group-strength effort was mounted to neutralise them.

Numerous success stories abounded following the lucky detection of such dumps during 1952-53. One such attack was recorded on 12 March 1952, which saw a group effort mounted by the 8th FBG – the post-mission photos revealed that the group had destroyed one of the largest supply dumps discovered during the entire Korean War. How this site came to be detected was not reported in the following press release;

'In a spectacular flexing of its combat muscle-power, the 8th FBG methodically smashed record after record. It flew a single day's high of 254 combat sorties, dropped 346,000 lbs of bombs, 43,000 gallons of napalm and fired 45,100 rounds of 0.50-calibre ammunition. The supply dumps were concentrated in a 50-square-mile area, which made the target one of the largest of the war.'

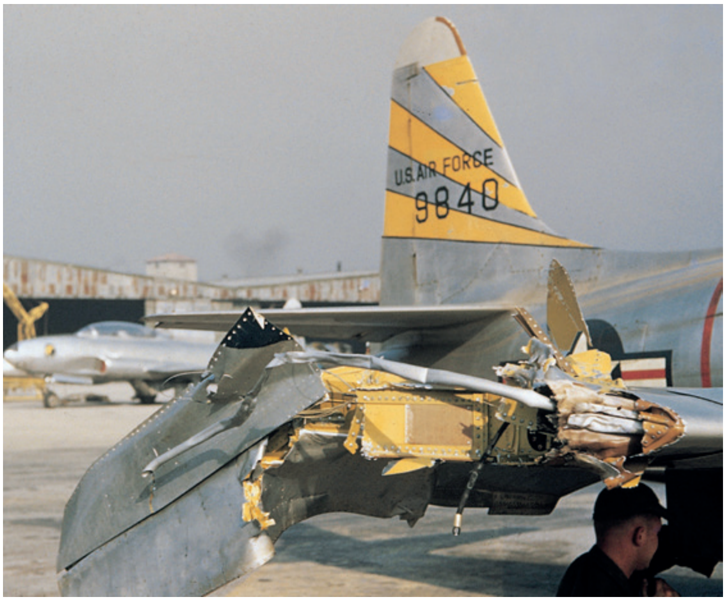
The F-80 pilots had methodically worked their way from the perimeters of the dump to the centre, which was located around the village of Sinmak – the entire storage area was in a huge horseshoe-shaped valley. The first waves of aircraft, led by Lt Col Levi Chase (CO of the 8th FBG), followed a river that ran from Mulgae-ri to the target area southeast of Sinmak. From a distance, all the pilots could see was an innocent-looking collection of buildings that formed a typical Korean farming village. However, upon reaching the target area, pilots realised that the 'village' looked rather different to any other they had encountered in the past.

'The communists had piled supplies in small revetments terraced all along the hills', noted one unnamed pilot quoted in the press release. 'The stacks of supplies were bare on the sides, but they had been covered with fake straw roofs. We could plainly see the boxes neatly piled up. Most of the 8th's aircraft were loaded with napalm and 0.50-cal ammunition. As our flights made their runs, we spread out and started burning everything from the outside in. We had enough napalm to cover most of the area.'

Flights from all three squadrons continued to work over the area for most of the day, with 2Lt David Ray, a pilot from the 80th FBS, flying one of the final strikes;

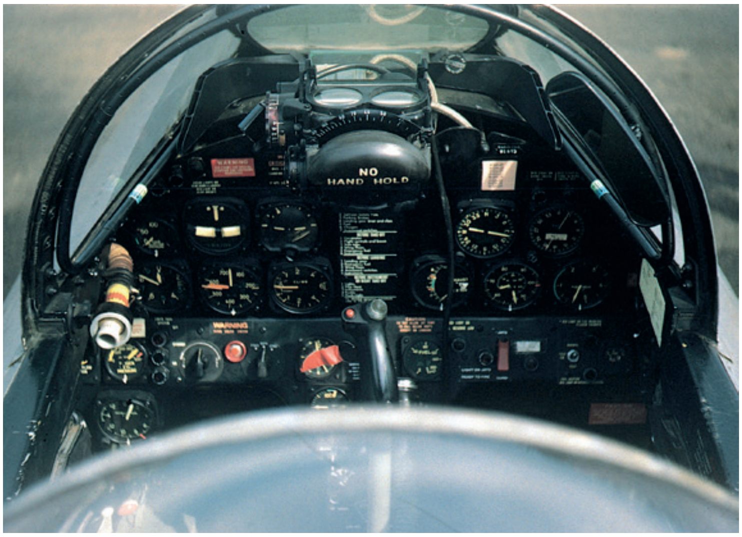
'We were one of the last to hit the five- by ten-mile area, and as we approached the valley, it looked as though an atomic bomb had already hit the place. It was hard to tell if there was anything left untouched because there was a layer of heavy smoke and fire everywhere.'

Planning these missions was not easy. On paper, at least, it appeared that the group simply had to send every available F-80 to hit the target with as much ordnance as the jets could carry. However, to have put such a plan into practice would have resulted in major casualties for the attacking pilots, as the ridges that surrounded the target were heavily fortified with flak batteries. These AAA weapons had to be neutralised prior to the supply dump being attacked, so specific flak suppression flights (with aircraft carrying 500-lb GP bombs) were sent in minutes ahead of the main strike force. Leading



The F-80 proved itself to be every bit as rugged as its piston-engined forebears from World War 2, being able to absorb heavy battle damage of the sort shown in this photograph. The starboard wingtip of F-80C 80th FBS 49-840 was split wide open when it struck a cable while on a low-level strafing run through a mountain valley in North Korea in 1952. Despite this, the pilot was still able to land the aircraft back at Suwon, where it was repaired one such flight was 1Lt Francis Walton of the 80th FBS;

'It was our job to knock out the flak positions in order to clear the way for the guys carrying the napalm. We each carried four 500-lb bombs, and every time we'd hit the ridge line, the clouds of smoke would climb higher and higher into the sky! It looked like the entire ridge was blowing up. We got 100 per cent coverage. It was difficult to tell how many troop casualties we inflicted because the smoke and debris was so thick. Most of us flew three missions that day, and there is no doubt in my mind that this was the most effective series of sorties that I carried out.'



The 'office' for Shooting Star pilots during the Korean War. This photograph reveals the instrument panel and Sperry K-14 reflector gunsight. The latter was a US development of the British Ferranti Mark II Gyro Sight that had started to reach frontline fighters during the final year of World War 2

Twenty-four hours after this famous group effort, Lt Col Chase was asked to make a statement about the previous day's accomplishments;

'The most gratifying thing to me as commander of this outstanding fighter group was the spirit of everyone in the outfit, both officers and airmen. Wherever there was a bottleneck in the operations, everybody pitched in and solved it, thus keeping all of our aircraft in the air. They did a terrific job. I've experienced a lot of good shows, but this one was the best. We had no accidents and no losses to mar the day's splendid operations. It is a tribute to our maintenance crews that we had as many F-80s ready to fly at the end of the day as we did at the start!

'In the past, the 8th FBG had been restricted to a specific type of interdiction target. Fifth Air Force wanted to know just how effective we would be if our mission and target were suddenly changed. We were handed this target and told that the rest was up to us. We worked through the night planning where we would hit. You just don't go into a big area like that and start hunting. Every aircraft had a specific mission, and with the weather cooperating, we did a splendid job!'

As the war entered its final year, little changed in Korea. The Chinese knew they had no chance of pushing the UN forces off the peninsula, so their only hope was to capture a few miles of ground south of the 38th Parallel. Such a modest gain would allow North Korea to claim a psychological victory over its capitalist enemies. Preparing for this offensive, the PVA quickly amassed another enormous cache of supplies in Suan County, not far from the Sinmak dump that had been destroyed by the 8th FBG in March 1952. The new site was also detected by UN troops, and the FEAF ordered an immediate group-strength strike. Unlike the Sinmak attacks, the operation to destroy the new site would not end on such a positive note for the fighter-bomber force.

The missions took place on 8 May 1952, and one of the pilots sortied was the 80th FBS's 1Lt Richard Durkee. He gave the following account to the author in 2000;

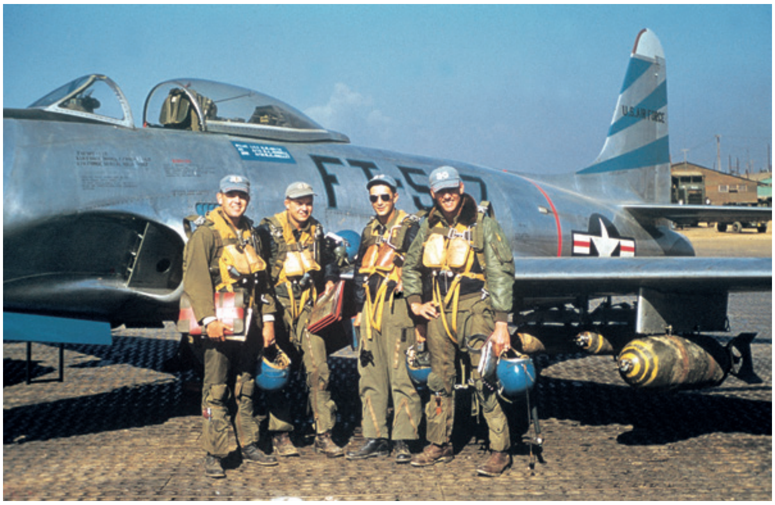
'Our briefing for this mission was at 0330 hrs, and the entire complement of group pilots was present. We knew we would fly at least three missions that day, with our first one being flak suppression, followed by two with napalm. I was scheduled for the first two (flak suppression and napalm), and I would be serving as wingman for our new squadron commander on both strikes.

'Napalm was equally unpopular with both sides. The enemy feared it, while us F-80 pilots didn't like it either because the Japanese-supplied napalm tanks we had were of such poor quality that we had a speed restriction placed on us so that they would not be ripped apart by the airstream. Of course, any restriction placed on the maximum airspeed we could use approaching a target made it much easier for the enemy to hit our planes. The tactical use of napalm called for a very flat bomb run at a very low altitude, which, when combined with low airspeed, made our Shooting Stars sitting ducks.

'Takeoff, rendezvous and navigation to the target area went without incident. We arrived at first light and immediately went into our bomb runs against the gun emplacements. Attacking in semi-darkness, we could see the red glow of the projectiles as they came up to meet us. We were probably having the same amount of lead thrown up at us during daylight attacks, but in this light we could actually see the rounds – and that was scary. Our suppression wasn't a big success, for there was more flak coming up at us when we left the area than when we had arrived! This indicated that either we didn't knock the guns out with our bombs, or that the Intelligence people didn't know just how many of them were around the target. By the time we landed back at Suwon from the first strike, we all knew that the next two would be hot ones!

'We debriefed from the first mission and attended the briefing for mission number two. Once again, I would be flying on the wing of Maj Arthur Faunce, our new squadron CO. We arrived over the target area and started our descent to near-ground level so that we would be at the proper altitude for our napalm run. We were hoping that by coming in so low, we would enjoy the element of surprise. As we flew over the hills and dropped down into the valley, we knew from the flak that our arrival had been no surprise – they were waiting for us! At our low scheduled airspeed it seemed we were standing still.

'The napalm drop was on target, and as my leader and I pulled up out of the valley, I spotted a small fire in the dive brake area on the underside of the CO's jet. I immediately called him on the radio and told him about it. He acknowledged the transmission, but seconds



These four pilots from the 35th FBS have finished their mission briefing and been driven out to the squadron dispersal, where they have briefly posed for 1Lt Richard T 'Durk' Durkee's camera prior to climbing into the cockpits of their jets for a bombing sortie against Chinese targets above the MLR in the summer of 1952. Liberally marked in the same shade of squadron blue as the pilots' P-1 'bone domes', F-80C 49-547 parked behind them is armed with four 100-lb and two 250-lb bombs later I saw him punching off his external fuel tanks and, at the same time, he radioed in an excited voice that he was getting out!

'I pulled up alongside him to get a better look at the fire, by which time his aircraft was just starting to go from a nose-up attitude to a level position, although this soon changed to nose-down. We were flying in a left turn throughout this period. I observed that he had slumped forward in the cockpit, probably unconscious. With the jet's nose down at the low altitude we were flying, I knew that if he didn't regain consciousness quickly it would be too late. As he approached the ground, I had to break away, but I kept yelling for him to pull up!

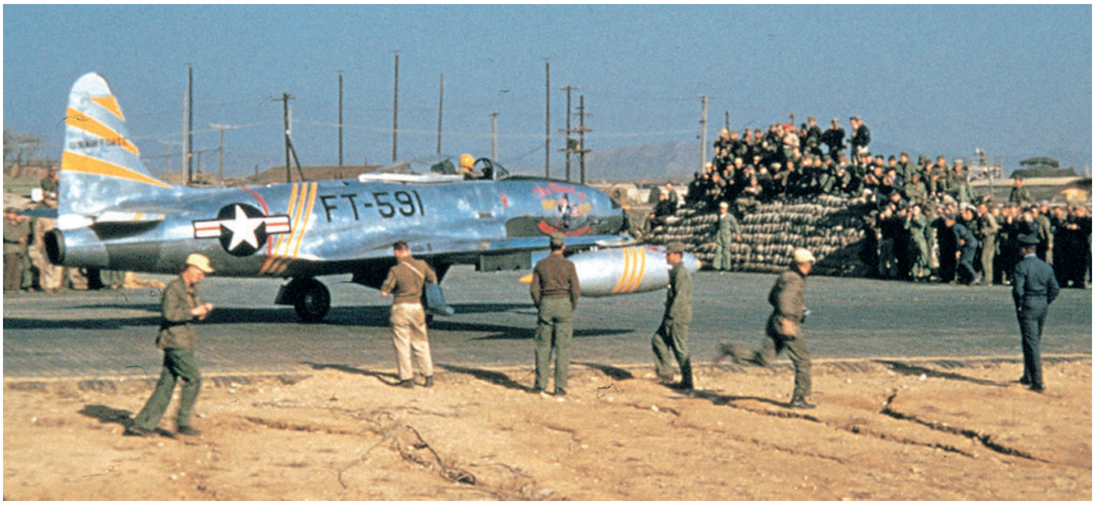
'Seconds later, he flew into a hillside and his aircraft burst into a yellow-orange ball of flame. It was a tragic day for our squadron, for we also lost "B" Flight commander 1Lt Robert Coffee. Seven other aircraft sustained heavy damage, although they all made it back to base. That day, after almost 50 years, is still etched in my memory just like it was yesterday!'

MOUNTING MISSION TALLY

On 28 October 1952, the 8th FBG gained international attention when it logged its 50,000th combat sortie. The pilot who had the honour of flying this milestone mission was 2Lt Warren R Guibor, who was at the controls of one of 36 F-80s from the group sent to bomb troop concentrations in and around the Wonsan area – these soldiers were part of a new PVA offensive. When Guibor landed, it triggered one of the biggest celebrations of the war.

Senior officers at 8th FBG HQ knew that this milestone was approaching, and they had already painted up the aircraft with appropriate mission titling and hung banners prior to the jets returning to base. This event secured media coverage in just about every newspaper in America, with the featured speaker at the festivities being Fifth Air Force commander Lt Gen Glenn O Barcus.

The lion's share of the 50,000 sorties had been flown by the F-80s, although both the 35th and 36th FBSs had also used F-51 Mustangs



Greeted by a throng of groundcrew, 2Lt Warren R Guibor of the 80th FBS taxies in at Suwon following the completion of the 8th FBG's 50,000th combat sortie of the Korean War. This landmark flight occurred on 28 October 1952 when the group attacked troop concentrations in and around Wonsan – these soldiers were part of a new PVA offensive. No fewer than 36 F-80s from the 8th FBG participated in the mission during the early weeks of the war. By the time the conflict ended, the 8th had boosted its total to slightly over 63,000 combat sorties – most of which had been undertaken by the Shooting Star.

The Spirit of
HOBO
80TH

Every pilot that ever flew a combat mission in any war knew that it was the maintenance crews that kept the aircraft in the air. For the most part, these individuals have been omitted from the press attention lavished upon aviators in conflict. This was not the case when the 8th FBG honoured its 50,000th sortie, however, for the pilot, 2Lt Warren Guibor, posed for a series of press photographs with his entire groundcrew and their aircraft, F-80C 49-591 *The Spirit of HOBO*

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION

Despite its obvious shortcomings as a fighter, the F-80 proved itself over and over again in the ground attack role. It was fitting that the type's sole Medal of Honor recipient (one of only four such decorations presented to members of the USAF in Korea) earned his award flying in support of 'grunts on the ground'. On 22 November 1952, 80th FBS flight leader Maj Charles J Loring Jr was circling over Kunwha when he and his section were told by a FAC that a T-6 'Mosquito' flying over Sniper Ridge had spotted a concentration of Chinese artillery that had UN troops pinned down on top of the ridge itself.

1Lt Thomas M Crawford from the 6148th Tactical Control Squadron was the pilot of the T-6, and he provided target spotting for Loring and his squadronmates;

'I spotted three Chinese artillery pieces firing for the first time, and the amount of flak they were putting up was heavy. I got the okay from HQ and put the white smoke right on top of them. The leader went in to hit the target. I saw a huge explosion and fire that rose to about 500 ft, but it was about 1000 yards away from the target – right on the spot where the ground FAC had said the other artillery positions were! I called lead and told him that was the largest secondary explosion and fire I had ever seen. He didn't answer.

'By then his No 2 was rolling into his pass, and he asked me where did I want his bombs? I told him to aim for the white smoke marking round I had expended minutes earlier, and he dropped his bomb load on the target. The remaining two F-80s rolled in and also dropped their bombs on the smoke marker. The last man hit exactly where I saw two of the guns firing. I told them to stay south while I looked the target over prior to giving them an evaluation.

'I went in, twisting and turning to avoid the flak. The fire from the leader's pass was still burning, with heavy, black, greasy smoke. An area of more than 100 yards in diameter was burning out there. In the second area, two of the gun positions I had seen firing were destroyed. On the way back to friendly lines one of the F-80s pilots told me "'Mosquito', you'd better get out of there – they're firing all around you". I could see the flak going by, and also white puffs exploding around me.

'When I got back to friendly territory, I called the leader to tell him how his flight had done. He didn't answer. The No 3 man in the flight also called him, but still no answer. Then No 2 spoke up and said "I think he went in on his pass!" It was then that I knew what had caused the explosion and fire that I had seen. I called No 3 – the second in command of the flight – and told him I was going back in to make sure. I asked him if his two F-80s could cover me as I made a low pass over the area.'

Maj Loring's F-80 had indeed suffered several hits during one of his dive-bombing runs, making it impossible for him to return to base. Wrestling with the controls of his stricken jet, Loring succeeded in gaining sufficient altitude to allow him to dive at the enemy guns one last time. He crashed his F-80 squarely into the emplacement, resulting in a violent explosion that instantly killed him. Loring's body was never found, and he is listed as 'Missing in Action, presumed killed'.

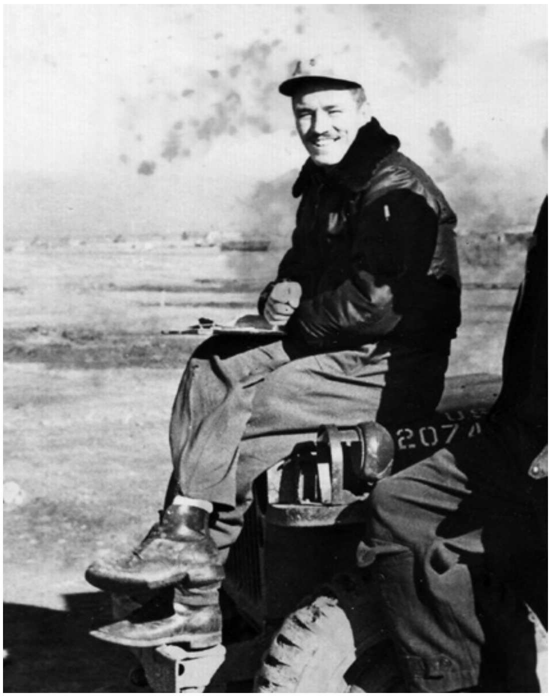
Second-tour veteran 1Lt George R 'Bob' Veazey of the 36th FBS was also racking up the sorties during the final months of 1952, flying both CAS missions for troops in the frontline and interdiction sweeps of enemy supply lines. 'Interdiction missions were generally against targets behind the frontlines, and they usually involved squadron-strength (12 Shooting Stars) formations', he explained. 'These were designated as "pre-briefed" missions. CAS missions were generally less formal, with the briefing sometimes received via radio from the radar controller on the ground while the flight of four aircraft were en route to the target area. These missions came under the control of the JOC in Seoul, and hence were called JOC missions. They were flown on an "as needed" basis. One flight was always on standby for such missions, ready to be scrambled at a minute's notice.

'Most JOC missions were flown in good weather so that the frontline targets could be easily identified. Dropping your bombs on your own troops was to be avoided at all costs. Some JOC missions, however, were flown in bad weather, with bombs dropped upon receiving the signal to do so from the radar controller – he had calculated the bomb trajectory and impact point by computation.

'I participated in a number of radar-controlled missions, the most memorable of which occurred on 12 November 1952. I reported to 8th FBG Operations for JOC Alert early that morning, along with three other pilots. On the assignment board 1Lt "Hezzie" Dunaway was listed for flight lead. I received word that I would be flying No 4 on No 3's wing. The weather was rather bad for flying a mission that morning. It was cold, rain was coming down at a steady pace and the cloud base was at about 800 ft above the ground. Our weather "guesser" told us the cloud tops were at about 20,000 ft – well above the 12,000-ft altitude where we flew.

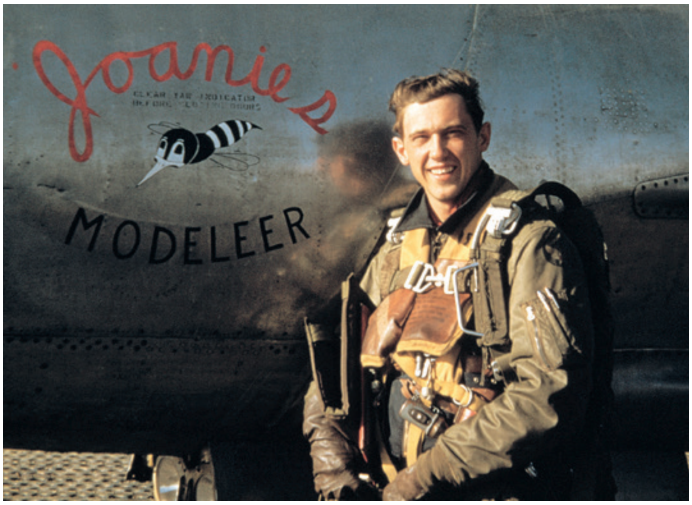
'The scramble call came at 0820 hrs. We four pilots rushed across the flightline to our F-80s, which we had previously inspected and readied for flight. Our crew chiefs had started the engines and we strapped ourselves in as we taxied out to the runway. Immediately after take-off "Hezzie" banked to the left

Maj Charles Loring, operations officer of the 80th FBS, relaxes at Suwon between missions in the autumn of 1952. A P-47 pilot in World War 2 (he had spent the final six months of the European campaign in a PoW camp after being downed by flak over Belgium on Christmas Eve 1944), Loring had completed 50 missions in Korea by the time he flew his mortally damaged P-80C into an enemy AAA battery on 22 November 1952. He was killed in the resulting crash, having destroyed the battery with his aircraft. Loring was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor



in a low turn to stay below the clouds while we in the second element joined up into a "V", or normal, formation. The leader then led us north, climbing into the clouds as he contacted our radar controller.

""'Dentist Control', this is 'Bluster Mike' leader, Mission 0810. We request course to the target." The controller replied "Roger Mike, steer 010, advise reaching angels 12, squawk two". As directed, "Hezzie" turned right to a heading of ten degrees and changed the setting of his radar transponder, nicknamed "parrot" [hence the "squawk" call] to setting two, enabling the controller to readily identify our flight on his radar screen. The other flight members maintained position in close formation on "Hezzie", the aircraft scant feet apart and appearing to each other as a dark outline through the mist.



Two-tour veteran 1Lt George R Veazey of the 36th FBS poses with his *Joanie D MODELEER* (F-80C 49-817) in the squadron dispersal at Suwon in late 1952. Squadronmate 1Lt Heath T Glass Jr was killed in this aircraft when it was brought down by ground fire on 3 January 1953

'When we climbed to "angels 12" [12,000 ft], our leader called the controller, who placed us over the target as quickly as possible. On his count down, we dropped our bombs. At about that time the heavy AAA started, and when looking back over the target area we could see flashes from shells detonating near us. We were rocked several times by concussions from the explosions as the rounds got closer to us.

'With "Dentist Control's" permission, we started to climb in order to conserve the fuel of one of the F-80s that was having tank-feed trouble – a routine problem with the jet. We headed south still in a climb, passing through 20,000 ft, where the cloud tops were supposed to be, yet still finding ourselves in the weather. At close to 30,000 ft, our poor war-weary F-80s were struggling to stay in a climb. It was then that we noticed an ominous glaze on our wings – clear ice! The added weight and drag of such ice deposits could literally cause us to fall out of the sky. By this time we had drifted safely back over friendly territory, and "Dentist Control" quickly put us into a spiral decent to get us down to warmer weather.

'At this point one of the guys in my flight called out "Texaco", which meant his low fuel warning light had come on. He now had only ten minutes of fuel left in his tanks. I called our controller and told him that one of us had an emergency. I also asked him how close we were to an airfield, and that we were at an altitude of 5000 ft. He in turn told us that there wasn't an airfield close enough for him to land on – we were to find a road or pick a spot for him to eject. We broke out of the clouds at 500 ft, and just ahead of us was Osan AB, then still under construction [it would become home to the 18th FBG on 26 December 1952]. The pilot that was low on fuel landed there minutes later, and his engine quit shortly after he had touched down.

'Dealing with flak was just one of the hazards that we routinely had to face in Korea. Bad weather and marginal fuel were two others.'

By now encountering very few visible targets during the day, the 8th FBG became increasingly more reliant on intelligence gathered from RF-80 photo missions, as well as feedback from the nocturnal B-26 units. For example, if there had been convoys damaged during the pre-dawn hours, this information was sent to FEAF HQ, who ordered a 'first light' mission to be launched to pick off any stragglers. The same worked for any trains that were caught short of the tunnels.

Despite the relative stalemate in the frontlines, the record sortie surges that were set by several squadrons were actually accomplished in the early months of 1953. The F-80 units deserved particular praise for their efforts, for they were flying some of the oldest aircraft in-theatre. As the curtain slowly came down on the Shooting Star's action-packed career in Korea, it was the 80th FBS that momentarily diverted the media's attention away from the F-86 and focused it squarely on the unit's war-weary jets.

As far back as 11 March 1952, the 80th had set a then-unprecedented record of 96 sorties in a single day. This tally remained unbeaten until early April 1953, when Marine Air Group (MAG) 33 flew an amazing 117 sorties in one day – this mark would last slightly over two weeks. With the remaining F-80 fighter-bomber group in Korea down to its last squadron, and the jet's combat career all but over, the 80th flew a record-shattering 120 sorties in a single day on 24 April 1953.

The setting of this record was neither pre-planned nor discussed in the pre-dawn briefings – it just seemed to take on a personality all of its own. By 0630 hrs, there were already 16 aircraft in the air returning from their early first-light strikes. This made for a solid foundation for a record attempt. By the time the first wave had landed back at Suwon, FEAF's JOC was calling in scores of targets all over North Korea. At that point there was talk in the 80th FBS about how well the day's sorties had gone so far, but MAG-33's tally was still a long way off. As wave after wave of F-80s departed Suwon, returning flights circled overhead, waiting for a chance to land. By the time these aircraft had taxied back into their revetments, the bomb trucks were already delivering ordnance to the flightline for the next wave. Everything seemed to be working perfectly.

It was not until the sun began to set that the unit's mission planners realised they were only a few sorties short of breaking the record. It came down to the wire, and as the 80th FBS's CO later put it, 'If we had had just one abort, one plane out of commission for the day, then the entire effort would have been a failure – it was that close!' Aircraft were turned around so quickly that one F-80 flew eight sorties and six others completed seven.

The squadron inflicted widespread damage during its 120 sorties, dropping 240 bombs for the day – 200 of them against targets spread along the entire length of the frontline, and the remaining 40 well into North Korea. The official FEAF press release stating the damage done by the 80th FBS on 24 April read as follows;

'1115 yards of trenches damaged, 13 caves damaged, six caves destroyed, 33 bunkers damaged, 19 mortar positions damaged, ten personnel shelters destroyed, numerous gun positions damaged, seven secondary explosions after hits on ammo dumps, along with numerous other targets damaged or destroyed.'

Weather conditions on this day were perfect for ground attack sorties, with pilots encountering negligible wind, which further increased the accuracy of their bombing runs. Admittedly, smoke and dust created by previous explosions lingered over the target areas, delaying incoming flights from dropping their bombs by a few minutes. The accurate target descriptions given by the T-6 'Mosquito' FAC pilots allowed the fighter-bombers to identify and hit their targets quickly, facilitating a rapid return to Suwon for rearming.

This combination of aggressive F-80 pilots, experienced 'Mosquito' pilots and effective target marking by the US Army's artillerymen led to more than 100 CAS missions being successfully flown on this day. Astonishingly, none of the Shooting Stars involved in the CAS operations received even the slightest damage. Of the 20 aircraft that flew sorties north of the 38th Parallel on 24 April, two F-80s reported battle damage but none were lost. Ironically, those machines that were hit were participating in the first and last flights of the day. On the 'first-light' mission, 2Lt Richard Housum was strafing a line of trucks when his jet was struck in the nose by automatic weapons fire. During the 'last-light recce', the F-80 of 2Lt Donald W Culver was damaged while dive-bombing a bridge. A single 40 mm round punctured its fuselage, although this failed to prevent Culver from safely returning to Suwon.

As an example of how motivated the entire unit was on this day, maintenance crews repaired 2Lt Housum's jet in time for it to participate in a sortie (with another pilot at the controls) flown just eight hours after it was hit.

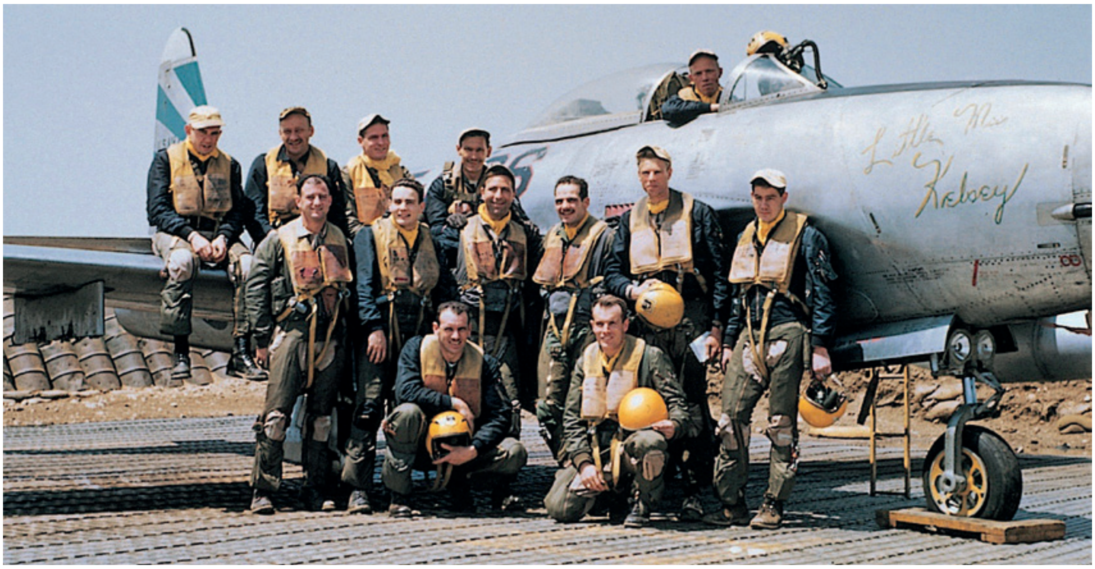
The real unsung heroes of 24 April 1953 were the crew chiefs, armourers and various other support personnel at Suwon. Indeed, without them, the record would never have been broken. Flying 20 F-80s, the 80th FBS's 120-sortie surge was completed without a single abort, which in itself is the biggest compliment that a dedicated groundcrew could receive. On innumerable occasions, less than ten minutes after an aircraft had landed after completing a mission, another pilot would be climbing up the ladder to strap into the still warm cockpit to fly a mission. Some aviators

Both of the USAF's high profile fighter-bombers (the F-80 and F-84) actively targeted bridges in North Korea, with units quickly finding that the 1000-lb GP bomb was the most effective against these targets. The centre span of this particular bridge was 'dropped' by fighter-bombers early in the war, and the communists had made no effort to repair it prior to its recapture by advancing UN forces commented that if they stopped to chat with someone for a few minutes before reporting to debriefing, they would see the aircraft they had just landed taxi out with a full bomb load. This meant that the jet had been fuelled and armed with 2000 lbs of bombs in around 20 minutes.

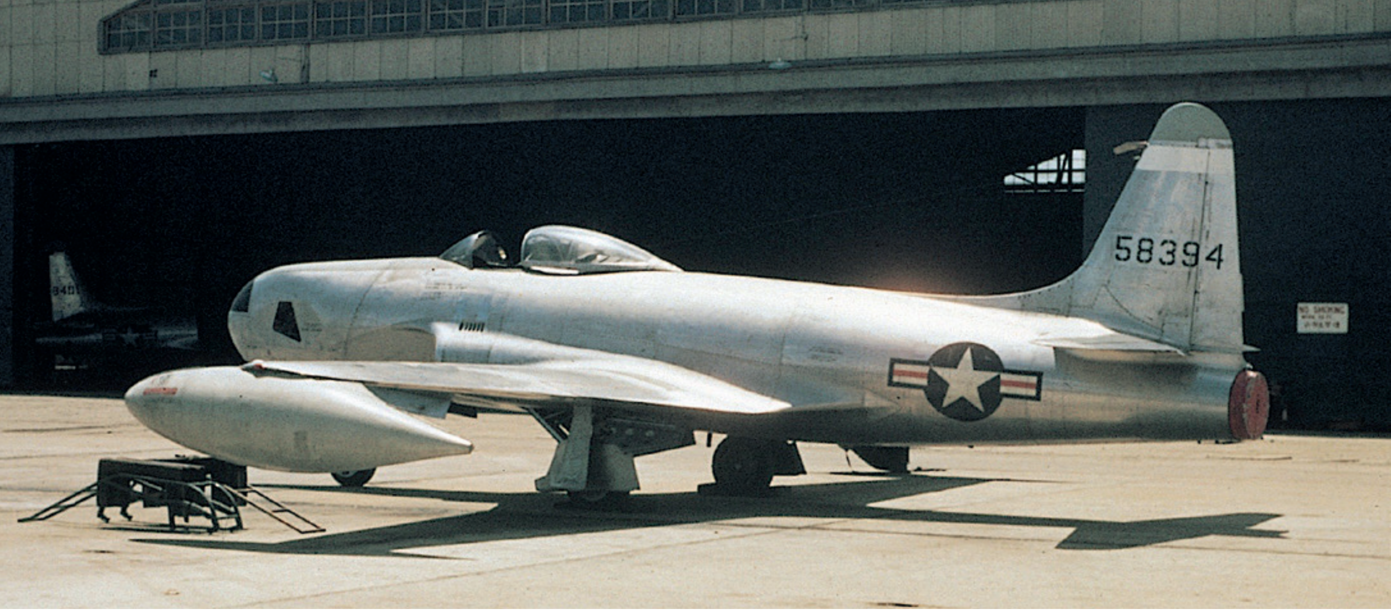
The 24th was truly a pilot's day, for only two of the 29 who sortied flew less than three missions – under normal conditions, a pilot might get to fly two missions in a day. Even the 80th FBS's Operations Officer, Maj George R Halliwell, got in a 'last-light' armed reconnaissance mission. He had spent the entire day scheduling aircraft and pilots, and was only able to break away for the sortie when the record was 'in the bag'. The final mission tally recorded that four pilots flew three sorties, 11 flew four, ten flew five and two took top honours with six sorties apiece. The latter pair – 1Lts Arthur D Violette Jr and Theodore A Platz Jr – tied an existing record that had been set by a T-6 'Mosquito' pilot from the 6167th Tactical Reconnaissance Group.

On 6 May, the 80th FBS flew its final combat missions in the F-80C, thus bringing to an end the venerable jet's career as a fighter-bomber in Korea. On this historic day, aircraft from the unit targeted an airfield on the Haeju peninsula, on the northwest coast of North Korea. The jets involved were armed with 24,000 lbs of bombs, and their primary mission was to crater the runway and destroy any intact buildings found on the field. The F-80s were flown by pilots who had already completed 100 missions each, and they all subsequently returned safely to base. One of them summed up the mood in the squadron when he told a *Stars & Stripes* reporter at Taegu that 'a lot of us were very sorry to see the old bird go! We'll never really trust another one the way we trusted the F-80. She got a lot of us back home safely from hell!' The 80th commenced its transition to the F-86F within days of the final Shooting Star departing Taegu.

Of the 277 F-80s lost on operations in Korea (approximately 30 per cent of the existing inventory), 113 fell to ground fire and 14 were downed by MiG-15s. Shooting Stars were in turn credited with destroying 17 aircraft in aerial combat and 24 on the ground, according to USAF records.



This group of F-80 pilots flew the final Shooting Star missions of the war on 6 May 1953, their yellow caps and 'bone domes' denoting that they all belonged to the 80th FBS. The aircraft behind them, however, had served with the 35th FBS until the squadron switched to the F-86F in the early spring of 1953 and passed its remaining F-80s on to the 80th



All 25 RF-80As in the FEAF pre-war were owned by the 8th TRS, based at Irumagawa AB, Japan – the unit moved to Yokota AB, also in Japan, in March 1949. They boasted few markings, and this aircraft (45-8394), seen shortly after joining the squadron in 1948, had been transferred to USAFE by the time the 8th flew its first missions over Korea – from Itazuke – in July 1950. Assigned to the 38th TRS/10th TRG at Spangdahlem AB, West Germany, following its brief service with the 8th TRS, the aircraft was written off here on 9 May 1954

CHAPTER SIX

PHOTO-RECCE RF-80s

FEAF press releases proudly boasted in 1949 and early 1950 that there were 365 F-80 Shooting Stars in the Far East. However, they failed to mention that there were only 25 RF-80As in-theatre. This meagre force would duly find itself hard-pressed to satisfy the demand for aerial photographs generated by the communist invasion of South Korea.

All RF-80As in the Far East were flown by the 8th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS), which was based at Yokota under the command of the 35th FBG. Once fighting started in Korea, the FEAF found that the RF-80 was the best platform for securing quality imagery of the NKPA's invading force. This effectively meant that the unit had to deal with virtually all of the UN's reconnaissance requirements during the first few weeks of the war. UN forces had no clear picture of what the situation in Korea was like for the first 48 hours of the invasion, and the Fifth Air Force's efforts to rectify this were hampered by the poor weather that blanketed the peninsula.

On the evening of 27 June, the 8th TRS moved four of its RF-80s from Yokota down to Itazuke, the latter being the closest major air base to South Korea. By the time the jets had completed their base move, the weather front had shifted to the south, and it was clearing up over the Seoul/Kimpo area.

Desperate for accurate intelligence, the FEAF ordered the 8th to sortie an RF-80 to take photos of the roads around Seoul. 1Lt Bryce Poe (who would eventually complete 90 missions over Korea) was selected to fly the jet, and on 28 June he officially became the first American pilot to undertake a combat reconnaissance mission in the Korean War. 'I had done some "spooky" photo jobs for Gen George Stratemeyer [commanding general of the FEAF in 1949-50] pre-war, so we had special double centre-section tip tanks with extra fuel and could stay on target a while', Poe explained. 'In contrast, an F-80C flying from a base in Japan could remain over the Seoul area for only 15 minutes.'

By the time Poe reached his target area, the weather had cleared to such an extent that he was able to take some excellent photographs. Now, for the first time, the war planners in Tokyo were able to see just how critical the situation was following the development of Poe's film. Within hours of obtaining photographic evidence of the extent of the invasion, UN strike planners had prioritised key targets and launched fighter-bombers to hit troop concentrations in the area that had been photographed. Poe recalls that memorable day;

'I was called in while the strikes were being carried out. They didn't waste any time in gleaning information from the film I had taken that morning. I was told to fly a follow-up sortie to film the damage that these early strikes had generated. I made a fast run at extremely low altitude over an enemy that fired a seemingly endless barrage of AAA, and I can't really recall much of what happened. I do remember, however, that there were countless burning trucks and smoke billowing skyward. The fighter-bombers, who were just reassembling after leaving the target, had done a great job.'

For the first ten weeks of the war, most of the Korean peninsula was considered to be enemy territory, which put extreme pressure on the 8th TRS because of the vast area of terrain it now had to monitor. The NKPA was using at least four major road routes to resupply its troops in the southern tip of the country, and although hard-pressed to cover each of them, at least the RF-80 pilots knew that enemy aircraft would not be one of the hazards they faced when flying these missions. Indeed, the key problems affecting the 8th TRS were all maintenance-related, for its overworked groundcrews were struggling to keep the unit's handful of RF-80s airworthy.

In order to gain the upper hand in a war such as this one, planners had to have accurate up-to-date photos of enemy strengths and movements. Only the RF-80 could provide these images, and the 25 jets in-theatre were immediately given top priority for spare parts. Furthermore, when the unit lost an aircraft through attrition or to heavy maintenance, a replacement RF-80 was immediately brought in from the USA.

One of the first facts revealed by the film shot by the 8th TRS was that the communist supply lines had to be severed in order to ease the pressure on UN troops in the Pusan Perimeter. This became the top priority of F-51s and F-80s, with the Mustangs in particular being very effective in this role due to their proximity to the action from bases at Pohang and Pusan – less than five minutes' flying time from the frontline.

Relief for the beleaguered troops on the Korean peninsula was in sight, however, with the launching of Operation *Chromite* – the amphibious landing at Inchon. For the US Marine Corps' First Division to succeed with this audacious invasion, it needed up-to-date photographs of Inchon harbour – the only ones in existence had been taken in 1948 by an RF-61C Black Widow, again flown by the 8th TRS. These did not reveal the extent of the high and low tides that were prevalent at Inchon, so RF-80s and US Marine Corps F4U-5Ps and F7F-3Ps were tasked with taking detailed photographs of the harbour, and its approaches, from every possible angle at certain times of the day.

The 8th TRS flew four precisely timed photo missions in two days, the RF-80 pilots having to secure imagery with their oblique cameras at a dangerously low altitude. Once in possession of the tidal information they required, the *Chromite* planners came up with an effective landing strategy and the US Marines Corps did the rest. Within 24 hours of finishing the photo runs, more than 2000 copies of the images obtained by the RF-80s had been delivered to the assembling task force at Kobe Naval Base in Japan. The landing proved to be very successful, and the troops sent ashore quickly pushed east and severed the North Korean supply lines for the NKPA in the south, triggering a rapid communist retreat back to the 38th Parallel.

For the first six months of the war, the 8th TRS operated under greater pressure than any other unit in the FEAF – its pilots also flew further to complete their missions, being based in Japan. The few airfields in South Korea boasting suitable facilities for jet operations were made available exclusively to F-80 fighter-bomber groups for much of 1950. To make matters worse for the already hard-pressed reconnaissance pilots, on 1 November the first examples of the MiG-15 were encountered near the Chinese border. Early that morning, a lone B-26 and its T-6 'Mosquito' FAC had been jumped by a swarm of Yak fighters in the Yangsi area. A flight of F-51s patrolling nearby answered their call for help and shot down two of the enemy fighters.

An RF-80 was immediately despatched to take pictures of the closest enemy air base to where this action had taken place, and the photographs revealed 15 fighters parked on the field. Twelve F-80Cs were launched to destroy the aircraft and render the airfield inoperable. It proved to be a very difficult target to neutralise, for the revetments in which the aircraft were parked faced Manchuria. In order to properly set up for their bomb runs, the F-80s were exposed to intense AAA from both sides of the river. It was during the course of the airfield attack that a flight of F-51s was jumped by six MiG-15s just a few miles away.

From that date on, it became very dangerous for an unarmed aircraft to venture into the area, which was quickly dubbed 'MiG Alley'. For the RF-80, speed was its greatest defence, but the MiG-15 was at least 100 mph faster – such a speed difference would extract gallons of sweat from numerous RF-80 pilots! One such individual was 1Lt Francis W Meyer, who recalls a memorable encounter that he and his wingman had with a pair of MiG-15s north of Pyongyang in late 1950;

'Our mission for the day was to photograph the main railway line from Pyongyang northward to Sinuiju and Uiju airfields right after they had been hit by fighter-bombers. Due to the danger from the MiGs, when we worked up in this area we always sent two aircraft – one to take the pictures and the other to keep an eye out for enemy fighters. This was my 20th combat mission, and my first encounter with any of the MiGs.

'Having completed my photo run with my wingman, 1Lt Dick McNulty, up on the perch, we reversed so he could take his pictures. Approaching Sinuiju, I was indicating about 50 mph above McNulty's speed. As observer pilot, you would be all over the sky watching for MiGs, and this manoeuvring would get you behind the lead unless you increased your speed.

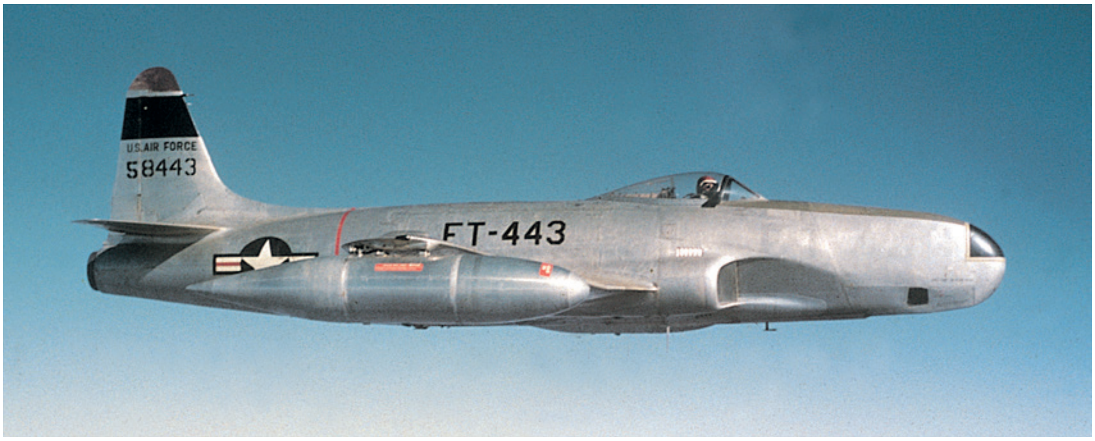
'I was in a left turn checking our tail, and had just started to reverse my turn to the right, when I noticed a white trail like a contrail. We were at 21,000 ft, which was much too low for contrails. About this time, I heard Dick shout over the radio "BREAK RIGHT FRANK". My adrenaline cut in and I panicked, breaking left then right in a dive for lower altitude. Just before I did break right, an orange fireball about the size of a grapefruit passed within a few feet of my canopy, followed by a MiG-15 overshooting me in a climb in an effort to make another pass at me! The pilot was looking down at me, and he was wearing a leather helmet and goggles.

'While in my dive I jettisoned the tip tanks so I could be more manoeuvrable. I called out to Dick to check on my MiG's position, and he replied he was shaking a MiG off his tail, and that the one that was after me had flown into one of my tip tanks right after I let them go – this was never confirmed of course. This episode was over in seconds, but I will never forget it! We did accomplish our mission, however, obtaining some good pictures.'

On 25 February 1951, the tactical reconnaissance operation in Korea became better organised with the activation of the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (TRW). This marked the demise of the 8th TRS, as it would now be known as the 15th TRS, equipped with the RF-80. Also included within this new wing was the 45th TRS (RF-51/F-51) and the 12th TRS (RB-26), the latter unit having the responsibility of operating at night.

From October 1950 until late February 1951, the reconnaissance mission had been controlled by the 543rd Tactical Support Group, based at Taegu. The 67th TRW duly established its first base here too once the Chinese advances had been checked and the frontline stabilised. Although the Taegu facility was one of the crudest in Korea at the time, it served the wing well until crowded conditions at Kimpo were eased by the opening

A high-flying RF-80A from the 15th TRS joins up with his wingman (out of shot) after completing his photo-runs over North Korea. This shot was taken during the first year of the war, when the squadron was operating out of Taegu AB. 45-8443 (one of the very last RF-80As built by Lockheed) performed myriad missions from June 1950 through to war's end. It was eventually retired to the Arizona Aircraft Storage Squadron at Davis-Monthan AFB in September 1957 and sold for scrapping five months later



of other airfields. Finally, on 22 August 1951, the 67th established its main HQ at the latter base, and it would remain here until war's end.

Legendary leader of the 67th TRW, Col Karl L 'Pop' Polifka, was the most respected expert on tactical reconnaissance within the USAF, and one of its most competent leaders. Unfortunately, his tenure did not last long, for he was killed while flying a dangerous low-level mission in an RF-51 on 1 July 1951. The wing had two interim commanders before Col Edwin Chickering was brought in on 31 October 1951. One of the first changes he made was to begin phasing out the Mustangs in favour of more RF-80s (issued to the 45th TRS). Like Polifka, he believed in flying the same missions as his men, and making as many passes over the target as it took to get the required pictures.

15TH TAC. RECON. SQ.
CAMERA REP.
OPERAT.
INTELL.
PERS. EQ.
COMM.
SUPPLY
GRD. POWER
MAINT.
EVERY MAN A TIGER

This sign was posted in front of the 15th TRS's Operations hut at Kimpo AB. The unit would operate two different photo-jets at the same time, namely the RF-80 and RF-86, although the former was always the numerically superior type within the squadron

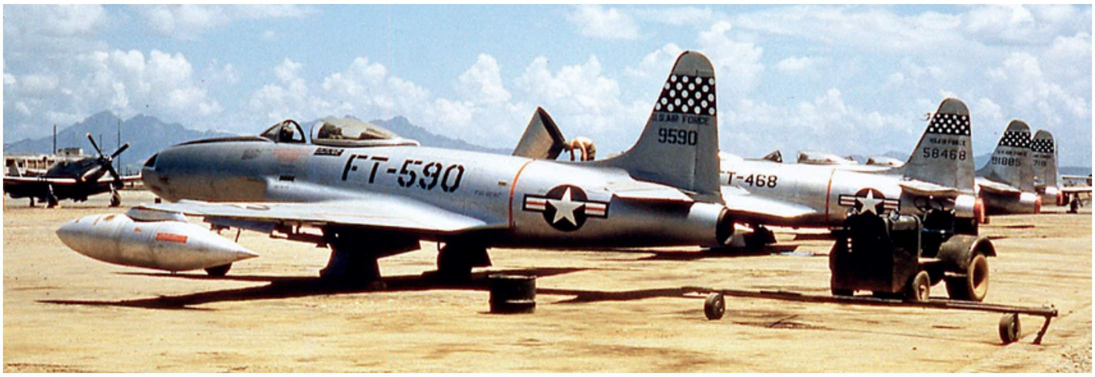
2Lt Elmer K Follis's combat deployment to Korea coincided with the 45th TRS's transition from the RF-51 to RF-80, which meant he flew both types operationally. He logged a lot of time in the 'cold seat' RF-80A (it had no ejection system, which meant the pilot had to bail out manually just like in the F-51). Here, Follis recalls an 'escort mission' he flew in an RF-80A deep into North Korea – indeed, right into the heart of 'MiG Alley';

'The objective was to take photographs of all the bridges spanning the Yalu River between Manchuria and the North Korean dams. I was also to shoot PoW camps located in the vicinity and other targets assigned by Intelligence sources. Only squadron pilots with at least 50 or more missions were allowed to fly these kinds of sorties, and strict scheduling ensured that all eligible pilots received their fair share of these dangerous assignments. This resulted in each pilot flying approximately three such mission during their entire tour.'

By 1952 such flights were so dangerous due to the increasing presence of MiG-15s over northwest North Korea that they required an escort of 16 F-86s, which accompanied the RF-80 throughout most of the mission. Four Sabres were to remain close to the RF-80 while the remaining 12 were to fly high above and behind, providing a barrier to enemy aircraft. The F-86s were to escort the RF-80 until it was well on its way home. It was only when the photo-reconnaissance jet was south of Pyongyang that the F-86s were allowed to break off and return to their base. 2Lt Follis details just such a mission along the Yalu River, which took place in December 1952;

'I was assigned 16 Sabres from the 51st FIG at Suwon for my first "MiG Alley" mission. This required a short hop down to the group's airfield in order to brief the F-86 pilots assigned to protect me. The intended targets to be photographed, the routes to be flown, altitudes and airspeeds were all identified. Then the F-86 flight lead briefed his pilots on escort procedures to be followed and the tactics to be used in case they encountered any MiGs. These procedures ensured the protection of the RF-80 at all times. When takeoff time approached, I taxied out to the runway and proceeded far enough down it in order to allow room for the F-86s to line up behind me. Since my aircraft was appreciably

OPPOSITE
A group of reconnaissance pilots from the 15th TRS pose for the camera on the flightline at Kimpo AB in the spring of 1952. They are in the back row, from left to right, 1Lts Pete Walker, William Carmel, Dan Brooksher, Paul Mulhern and Bob Burkhart and, squatting, Everett Brown and Norm Fredkin



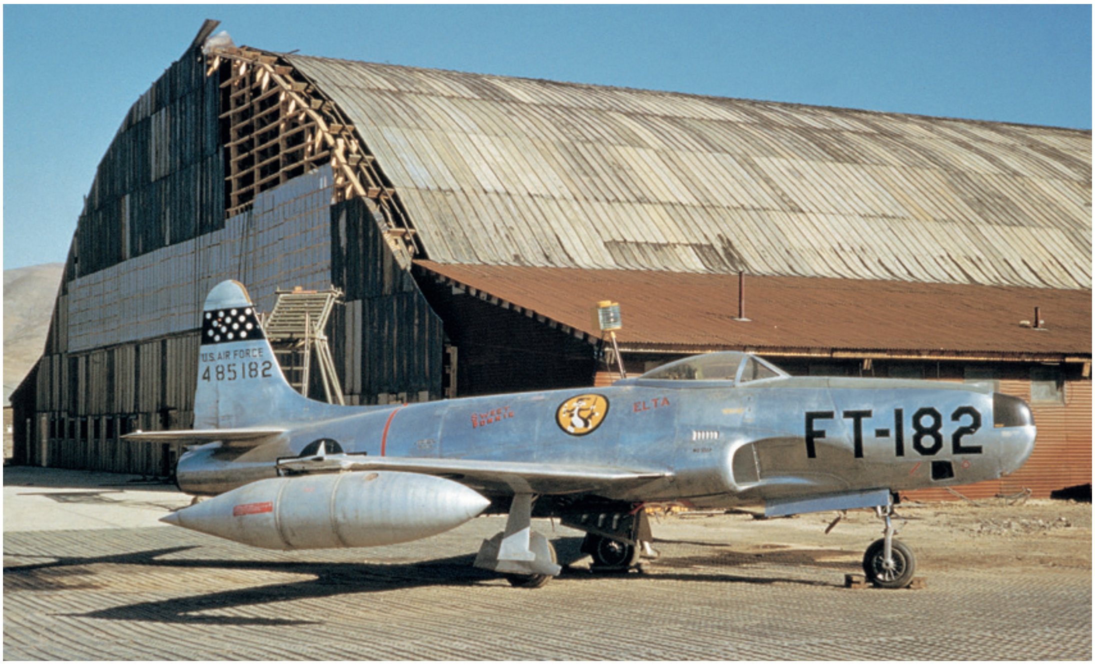
These newly marked Shooting Stars were assigned to the 45th TRS when the unit commenced its transition from the RF-51 to the RF-80 at Kimpo in June 1952 – note the Mustang sat opposite the F/RF-80s. The Shooting Star (49-590) parked closest to the camera is a standard F-80C allocated to the 45th to help its piston-engined pilots gain jet experience during their conversion to the Shooting Star. Next to it is RF-80A 45-8468, while third in line is RF-80C conversion 49-1885. It was lost to ground fire on 1 July 1953, the aircraft's wing catching fire and folding over before Capt James H Howell Jr could eject – by then 49-1885 was serving with the 15th TRS

slower than the Sabres, there was a lot of lateral movement in order to keep from overrunning the RF-80. They were always complaining that they had trouble keeping their Mach up.'

2Lt Follis had a 36-in focal length camera installed in his aircraft, which meant he had to take photographs from approximately 30,000 ft at a specified airspeed in order to achieve a 60 per cent overlap of each image that would allow the photo-interpreters to achieve a 3D effect. Since the heading, altitude and airspeed had to remain constant, it required Follis's full attention in the cockpit, and he could not look around for any MiG-15s. This was the responsibility of his escort. Furthermore, the RF-80 had no camera viewfinder in the cockpit, so the pilot had to constantly turn the aircraft on its side in order to position it over the target.

Proceeding up the Yalu, Follis was taking photographs when he heard the F-86 pilots start talking over the radio in a very excited manner. MiG-15s had been sighted in the near vicinity and everyone was being cautioned to be on the lookout for them. Follis had his hands full in the cockpit while on the photo run, however, which meant he could not start looking for MiGs;

'It was then that I heard the news that really shook me up! Someone yelled, "Look, there is a MiG on the RF's tail." If that doesn't get your immediate attention then nothing will! Then someone yelled out "RF break right NOW!" I did so immediately, as hard as I could, and then I noticed a MiG sitting right on my tail. I turned that RF-80 as tight as I could but it was no match for the MiG, which was starting to fire at me. I noticed the cannon shells coming right past my canopy – they were so close that I could have reached out and grabbed one if the canopy had been open. I just knew it was all over for me, as it wouldn't take long for the MiG pilot to start correcting his aim and nailing me with his 30 mm cannon. Then all of the firing stopped and I heard one of the F-86 pilots holler out, "You got him, thank God you got him." The MiG pilot had been so intent



on shooting me down that he hadn't noticed an F-86 slip up on his tail and blow him out of the sky! There were other kills by Sabre pilots nearby as well.

'The squadron procedure was if you were on a photo mission and were attacked by enemy aircraft, you were to abort the sortie immediately and head for home. I was very happy to comply with that directive and headed for Kimpo. When I released the escort a while later, I thanked them profusely for preventing me from being shot down. After landing, I proceeded to ascertain the name of the pilot who saved my life that day in "MiG Alley". I was especially pleased to learn that the aviator responsible was Ed Hepner, a good friend of mine and one of my flight training classmates.'

As this action clearly showed, although the RF-80 pilots could usually rely on a strong F-86 escort when flying over enemy territory, they could never consider any mission over North Korea to be a 'milk-run', even with the Sabres in attendance. For example, if there were enough MiGs 'out and about' to overwhelm the escort, there was always the chance that one would break through their formation and go after the defenceless RF-80.

The 45th TRS adopted its distinctive 'Polka Dots' after the unit had moved to Kimpo AB with its veteran RF-51s, and the marking was also transferred to the RF-80. As previously noted, the 45th commenced transitioning to the Shooting Star in June 1952, although a number of Mustangs remained on strength until year-end due to the RF-80's paucity in number. RF-80A 44-85182 was photographed during a visit to Taegu in late 1952. Note the unit emblem painted on its fuselage. 44-85182 had initially been built as an F-80A, and it was converted into a photo-reconnaissance aircraft by Lockheed Aircraft Services in 1951

BRIDGES MISSION

Most of the supplies, equipment and troops funnelling in from Manchuria into North Korea were transported along

YOUR 100 MISSION
CONGRATULATIONS ON

Wearing a lucky 'horseshoe' around his neck, 45th TRS pilot 2Lt Elmer K Follis shakes hands with his unit CO while still stood in the cockpit of his jet after completing his 100th mission over North Korea. Follis's early operational sorties were flown in the RF-51, prior to the 45th TRS completing its conversion to the RF-80

coastal roads and railway lines to areas close to the front. Approximately 70 miles southeast of the Yalu River, near the town of Sinuiju, these coastal roads and railway lines crossed a series of five bridges that spanned segments of the Chongchon River where it flowed into Korea Bay off the west coast of North Korea. The destruction of these bridges would severely disrupt the movement of men and materiel southward. However, the PVA knew this too, so it had them stoutly defended by highly trained and effective gunnery crews. There were approximately 700 AAA weapons in the vicinity of these five bridges – 400 light and 300 heavy guns.

After the Yalu River mission detailed earlier in this chapter, 2Lt Elmer K Follis rated a run over these bridges as the second-toughest sortie he flew in the RF-80;

'This network of bridges was considered to be one of the most important and lucrative targets in all of North Korea. It was also considered to be one of the most dangerous and well defended targets as well. Allied pilots were well aware of this superior bridge defence and gave it the proper respect it deserved. Whenever a recce pilot was assigned the task of photographing these bridges, the "unafraid" soon vanished from our motto.

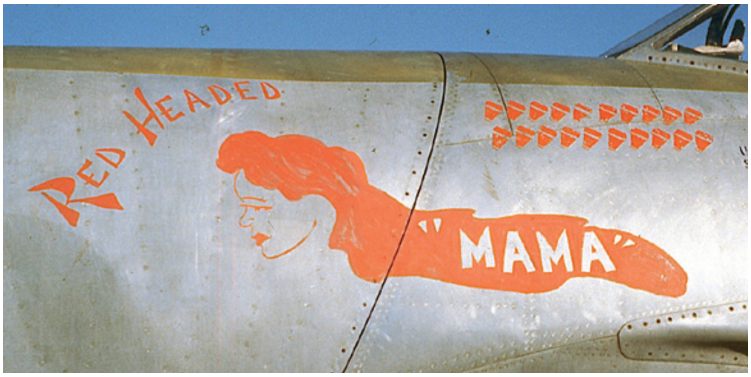
'Sometime in early January 1953, higher HQ decided to conduct an all-out maximum effort campaign against these bridges. The maximum strength of the entire fighter-bomber force throughout the entire theatre would be used to destroy them. Every aircraft that was in commission would be used.

'Prior to the attack being mounted, a recce pilot would take pre-strike photos of each bridge and then visually inspect each of their spans. Since the targets were so heavily defended, this was a formidable task to say the least. After doing so, the recce pilot was to remain in the area until the fighter-bomber strikes were completed. He would then return to the target area and take bomb damage assessment [BDA] photos of each bridge to ascertain which spans had been destroyed or damaged, or escaped destruction entirely. Considering the number of bridges involved, the number of individual passes over those bridges that would be needed to acquire the BDA information and the numbers of AAA weapons protecting those bridges, this mission could have been considered borderline suicidal.

'I was selected as the recce pilot to fly the first mission on this maximum effort endeavour. I would be flying a "cold seat" RF-80A as a "single ship", with no escort or companion recce aircraft. I would, therefore, be fulfilling two of three mottos – "alone, unarmed and unafraid" – of tactical reconnaissance, as well as my squadron motto of "First over the target and last to leave". After a thorough briefing from Intelligence as to what they required from the mission, I took off and proceeded to the target area.

'Upon arriving over the bridges I was amazed at how serene and peaceful

OPPOSITE
The working conditions at all bases in South Korea were generally poor for the duration of the war, and harsh winter weather did not help matters. Indeed, the moving parts within the RF-80's battery of nose-mounted cameras were particularly badly affected by cold and wet weather. Forced to work in the open in near blizzard conditions, these crewmen are seen loading film into the split vertical cameras, ready for a mission over the main supply routes in January 1953. 44-85253 was also a converted RF-80A that had previously seen service as an F-80A



Some 15th TRS jets were adorned with nose art in 1952-53, including RF-80A 45-8367 assigned to 2Lt Joe Lanahan, who also happened to be ginger! RF-80s stayed in-theatre far longer than their assigned pilots, and 45-8367 was flown by Capt James Nimmo as *Mon Petit Cheri* when the aircraft was allocated to him. Silhouettes of K-17 vertical cameras have been applied in red to signify missions completed by 45-8367

everything seemed. There was absolutely no anti-aircraft fire at all, and my presence failed to draw a single shot. I soon became very suspicious as to the complete absence of any AAA. It was as if they knew what was happening and didn't want to waste any ammo on an unarmed aircraft, giving away their firing locations in the process.

'I made several photo runs across each bridge and then visually inspected them all to determine their condition. It was now time for the fighters to arrive, so I climbed high above the target, throttled back to conserve fuel and awaited the forthcoming action. Once the fighter-bombers started their attacks, the once peaceful and serene atmosphere quickly changed. Suddenly, the sky was filled with all kinds of AAA fire. There were white bursts, black bursts, "red golf balls" and white tracers everywhere. This was the most AAA I ever saw during my entire time in Korea. It was absolutely devastating.

'When the last fighter-bomber pulled off the target and departed the area, I came down from my high perch and proceeded to undertake my BDA. This time the AAA did not ignore me, and it seemed as if all 700 guns now had only one target to shoot at – me!

'I had to make several runs to ensure that I adequately photographed all five bridges and visually inspected each one. The gunners knew exactly what I was doing, so it took them no time at all to aim their fire at me. They threw everything they had in my direction, and how I flew through all that heavy fire without getting hit was a miracle to say the least. I felt that the Lord was protecting me that day! When I arrived back at Kimpo, there was a large crowd of personnel waiting for me, eager to hear details of the mission. As I climbed down the ladder, everyone said that I was pale and shaking. I wonder why?

'My photos revealed that very little damage had been inflicted on the bridges. A bridge is an extremely difficult target to hit when dive-bombing with "slick bombs". If we had possessed "high drag" bombs like the ones we used in Vietnam, the results would have been much better. A second mission was subsequently flown, and the results were similar to those of the first strike – very little damage was done to the bridges. The recce pilot on this mission returned in a highly emotional state, being visibly shaken and talking to himself. After dodging AAA from 700 guns during multiple passes across the heavily defended bridges, this type of behaviour could be expected. Several more missions would be required against the bridges until sufficient damage was obtained to render them unpassable.'

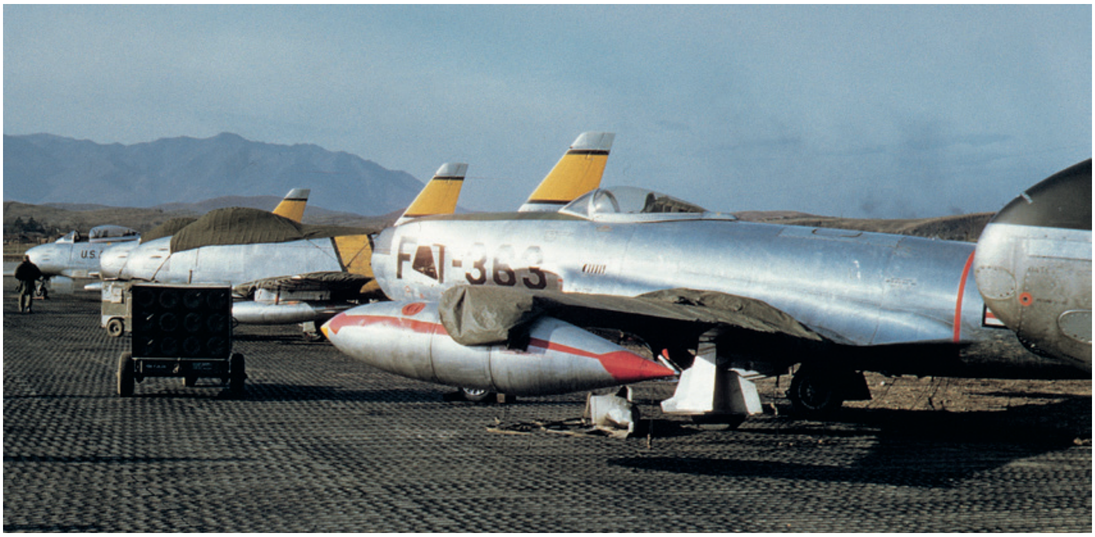
2Lt Follis and his squadronmates typically flew the RF-80A for much of the conflict, although a small number of war-weary F-80Cs were converted into RF-80Cs as attrition replacements in 1952. 'The RF-80A was the primary aircraft for taking photos', recalled Follis. 'The six 0.50-calibre machine guns in the nose of the F-80A had been replaced with a 36-inch focal length camera, plus several others such as oblique and forward in the RF-80A.

‘The aircraft was not equipped with an ejection seat, which meant an over-the-side bail out if you had to leave the jet in flight. It was referred to as a “cold seat”. Squadron pilots flew this aircraft on a daily basis on combat missions deep into enemy territory, some as far as “MiG Alley”. Our major maintenance and scheduled inspections were performed in Japan at Itazuke AB. When each aircraft had finished their maintenance and required a test hop, the pilots in Japan refused to fly them because of their “cold seats”. This required us to send one of the squadron pilots in Korea over to Japan to test hop the aircraft. This was criminal, as we were flying combat missions in the RF-80A yet they wouldn’t even test hop them.

‘It was a great photo-recce aircraft but didn’t have a viewfinder in the cockpit. This meant you had to keep regularly banking the plane up on its sides so as to ensure you were over your intended target.

‘Toward the end of my tour, the squadron received RF-80Cs. These aircraft had four of the 0.50-calibre guns replaced with a 24-inch focal length camera, which meant that the pilot could now make those deep-penetration photo missions with some degree of protection. I guess two guns were better than none. The addition of an ejection seat was also good news!’

From the winter of 1951, the 15th TRS supplanted its RF-80As with two rebuilt and locally modified RF-86As that were used to replace the slower Shooting Stars on some of the dangerous MiG-opposed missions in northwestern North Korea. Six more surplus airframes (a mix of A- and E-models) from the 4th FIG were quickly converted into recce Sabres at the Tachikawa factory in Japan where the FEAF overhauled its combat aircraft, and these remained in service until replaced by RF-86Fs in the spring of 1953. Although the Sabres were vastly superior to the RF-80s in respect to their speed and endurance, the quality of the photographs and versatility of the camera equipment fitted in the Shooting Stars ensured their survival in the frontline through to the armistice that brought an end to the Korean War on 27 July 1953.



By the final weeks of the conflict, both of the reconnaissance types shown here at Kimpo were regularly flying daylight photo-missions deep into North Korea. The RF-86 rarely needed a fighter escort, for it was fast enough to avoid any intercepting MiG-15s. Both types were operated side-by-side within the 15th TRS, with a handful of recce Sabres having first been employed by the unit from the winter of 1951. These were surplus airframes sourced from the 4th FIG and modified for the reconnaissance mission through the installation of cameras by the Tachikawa factory in Japan, where the FEAF overhauled its combat aircraft

APPENDICES

COLOUR PLATES

1

F-80C-11 44-85440 of the 9th FBS/49th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, June 1950

Originally based at Misawa and charged with defending northern Japan from attacks by Soviet bombers flying from Vladivostok, the 49th FBG quickly sent its units south to Itazuke following the outbreak of war in Korea. The first of the group's three squadrons to see action was the 9th FBS, whose aircraft (including this F-80C) featured both nose art and the squadron emblem. One of 129 F-80As converted by Lockheed Aircraft Services into C-models in 1949-50, *STINKY* completed a number of missions in the early months of the war. It had initially served with the 335th FIS/4th FIG prior to being reworked into an F-80C.

2

F-80C-10 49-653 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, June 1950

Gaudily christened *PANTHER QUEEN*, 49-653 was assigned to the 35th FBS when the 8th FBG replaced its F-51Ds with F-80Cs at Itazuke in 1949. Frequently flown by 1Lt Fletcher Meadows, the aircraft undertook myriad sorties with the group from bases in Japan (Itazuke and Tsuiki), before moving to Korea in early October 1950 and operating from Suwon, Kimpo, Pyongyang and Seoul ABs. It was flown back to Itazuke with the rest of the group on 10 December 1950 when the South Korean capital came under threat from the PVA. The jet returned to Suwon on 29 July 1951, by which time it had been transferred to the 51st FIG's 16th FIS. The veteran fighter was lost 22 days later when Capt Emmett N Long of the 51st FIG's HQ flight suffered engine failure in flight and force-landed behind enemy lines near Chinnampo, on the west coast of North Korea. Fellow F-80 pilots that witnessed the incident stated that the jet disintegrated on impact with the rough terrain. Long officially remains Missing in Action.

3

F-80C-10 49-671 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, early July 1950

This aircraft served with the 35th FBS during the first two months of the war, after which the unit transitioned back to the F-51D and passed its F-80s on to other squadrons in the FEAF. *SALTY DOG* was routinely flown by Capt Francis Clark, and he used the fighter to claim a Yak-9 shot down on 17 July 1950. Transferred to the 80th FBS the following month, 49-671 was lost on 10 September 1950 when, according to squadron diarist 1Lt J S Robertson, '2Lt Glenn Payne crashed into the ground while pressing home his attack on a camouflaged tank' four miles south of Songok-tong. He was one of three pilots from the 80th FBS to be killed in action that month.

4

F-80C-10 49-660 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, July 1950

A number of the F-80Cs flown by the 80th FBS in 1950 were adorned with elaborate and occasionally risqué artwork. One such aircraft was 49-660 *HORIZONTAL DREAM*, assigned to squadron diarist 1Lt John Robertson. It is depicted here with 'Misawa' tip tanks, which allowed a lightly armed F-80 to make the 620-mile round trip from Itazuke AB to the then frontline in the Han River area, north of Seoul. 49-660 was destroyed when it crashed on takeoff from Kimpo on 10 August 1951, killing 80th FBS pilot 1Lt Mark J Castellano.

5

F-80C-10 49-705 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, July 1950

RAMBLIN=RECK=TEW (which had replaced F-80A-1 44-85132 *Ramblin Wreck*, assigned to Capt Hank Pfeiffer, several months prior to the start of the conflict in Korea) was used by 1Lt Robert Dewald to claim one of four NKPAF Il-10s downed by the 35th FBS while defending Kimpo AB during the evacuation of US personnel on 27 June 1950. Note the solitary red star kill marking beneath the cockpit and modified 'Misawa' long-range tip tanks. Subsequently passed on to the 8th FBS/49th FBG, 49-705 was shot down by AAA during a strafing attack on Pyongyang Sunan AB on 23 March 1951. Capt Thomas Van Riper was almost certainly killed when the jet exploded on impact with the ground. He remains listed as Missing in Action.

6

F-80C-10 49-538 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, early August 1950

Still marked with a pre-war 'FT-' code on its nose and broad tail stripe in yellow, 49-538 was assigned to the 80th FS at the very start of the war in Korea. Surviving more than a year in the frontline with the unit, the aircraft was hit by AAA in the right wing and fuselage during a squadron-strength strike (it was the No 3 jet in an eight-jet section) on enemy troops in the Kunu-ri area of the frontline on 12 July 1951. The F-80 caught fire and crashed before its pilot, 1Lt Ervin E Taylor, could eject.

7

F-80C-10 49-765 of the 80th FBS/49th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, August-September 1950

Depicted here with the sunburst tail markings applied to all 8th FBG jets during August 1950, this aircraft was used by 1Lt Roy Marsh to claimed a NKPAF Il-10 on 29 June 1950 – it too has a victory star beneath the cockpit. Marsh also claimed two unidentified aircraft destroyed in a strafing attack on 19 July, although records do not confirm whether he was in 49-765 or not. The 80th was temporarily attached to the 49th FBG in August-September 1950, after which it went to Kimpo to join the 51st FIG. 49-765 was eventually transferred to the 35th FBS/8th FBG during 1951, and the jet was lost on 1 December that same year when 1Lt William C Womack flew it into a mountain south of Kimpo shortly after takeoff. Having already flown a mission from Suwon earlier in the day, he had had his aircraft refuelled at Kimpo and was heading home when the fatal crash occurred.

8

F-80C-10 49-695 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, August 1950

The 8th FBG would fly F-80s in combat over Korea for almost three years. One of myriad aircraft assigned to the group during this time was 49-695, depicted here devoid of the 35th FBS's recently introduced blue sunburst marking on its tail. The fighter was an early attrition replacement supplied to the FEAF from a unit in the USA, its peacetime 'FT-' codes on the nose and centre fuselage having clearly been removed prior to the jet's hasty introduction to frontline service at Itazuke. The tail fin was also stripped of the unit markings associated with 49-695's previous operator. 1Lt Louis Esposito lost his life in this aircraft when it exploded in mid-air after being hit by AAA near Koma-dong, northwest of the 38th Parallel, on 22 October 1951. 49-695 was still assigned to the 35th FBS at the time of its demise.

9

F-80C-10 49-581 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Naha AB, Okinawa, September 1950

The 25th FIS would see action with its F-80s from late September 1950 through to November, when the squadron switched to the F-86E. The unit's 'finest hour' with the Shooting Star came during December 1950 when its pilots flew more than 21 sorties per day from Kimpo for the duration of that month to save the US Army's 2nd Infantry Division, which had been cut off by the advancing PVA near the village of Kunu-ri, from being overrun. Air cover was officially credited with preventing disastrous losses to the division at this time. Transferred to the 16th FBS/8th FBG when the 25th FIS switched to Sabres, 49-581 survived until 26 January 1953, when it fell victim to AAA. Pilot 1Lt Robert A Hallman, who was lost with the aircraft, remains listed as Missing in Action.

10

F-80C-10 49-876 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, December 1950

This aircraft was issued to the 36th FBS upon its return to Itazuke AB following almost 11 weeks of operations in Korea with the F-51D – the unit had reverted to Mustangs from Shooting Stars in late July 1950. The fighter featured a large artwork of a bikini-clad woman holding a bomb under her left arm on its nose. Transferred to the 8th FBS/49th FBG in early 1951, 49-876 was written off in a forced landing at Chungju (now Jungwon) AB, in central South Korea, on 21 February that year. The aircraft, flown by Maj Irving W Boswell (a future CO of the 8th FBS), had suffered fuel exhaustion as a result of flak damage incurred during the mission.

11

F-80C-10 49-650 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, February 1951

This aircraft had distinctive nose art and the nickname *SAGGIN DRAGON* applied to both sides of its nose by 16th FIS crew chief Sgt Eugene O'Connell during the unit's ten-week deployment to Kimpo in late 1950. 49-650 had one of the most impressive battle records accrued by an F-80 in Korea, the jet completing 167 combat missions totalling 300 flying hours in less than six months. On one memorable occasion it struck a cable strung between two hills while flying at low level looking for targets, the pilot nursing the jet back to Kimpo minus the fibreglass housing for its fin tip AN/ARC-3 radio 'pickaxe' antenna, the right wingtip and much of the right horizontal stabiliser. The fighter-bomber also suffered significant damage on several other missions. 49-650's luck finally ran out on 7 March 1951 when it failed to take off from the runway at the recently liberated Taegu AB when laden down with fuel and ordnance. Pilot Capt Craven P Almond was injured in the subsequent crash and the aircraft destroyed.

12

F-80C-10 49-848 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Itazuke AB, Japan, April 1951

North Korea's high priority assets were well defended by AAA from virtually the start of the conflict, resulting in most F-80s returning to base with some degree of battle damage following a mission 'up north'. 49-848 was no exception, the aircraft suffering numerous hits while pulling out of a dive-bombing run on 5 May 1951. The damage inflicted caused the F-80 to suffer total hydraulic failure while making an emergency landing at Taegu. The jet eventually skidded to a halt on its belly off the side of the runway, the pilot having wisely chosen to jettison his tip tanks prior to attempting the landing. The fighter was not repaired.

13

F-80C-10 49-761 of the 7th FBS/49th FBG, Taegu, South Korea, June 1951

Bearing the 7th BS's distinctive 'Screamin' Demon' insignia on its nose, 49-761 was on strength with the unit at Taegu when it switched from the F-80C to the F-84E. Passed on to the 8th FBG's 36th FBS, the aircraft was brought down when hit by one of its own bombs during a low-level skip-bombing attack on a target northeast of Cholsan, in northwestern North Korea, on 10 August 1951. Its pilot, 1Lt James R Kiser (who had previously seen combat in F-51Ds with the unit – this was his 81st mission), successfully ejected. Although seriously wounded, he managed to evade capture until the following day. Kiser, who had turned 23 on the day he was forced to eject, subsequently spent the duration of the war in the notorious Camp Two in North Korea.

14

F-80C-10 49-665 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, July 1951

Boasting an impressive mission tally, this aircraft (christened *The Dregs*) was assigned to the CO of the 51st FIG, Col Irwin H Dregne, between April and July 1951. Dregne had commanded the 357th FG from December 1944 through to July 1945, during which time he downed two German aircraft and destroyed three more on the ground. Although 49-665 was on the strength of the 16th FIS, and featured the unit's blue nose marking, it bore the red tail stripes of the 25th FIS to denote its assignment to the group CO. The 51st's third squadron, the 26th FIS, used yellow as its colour. However, it remained on Okinawa throughout the war, hence the lack of yellow on this aircraft. 49-665 was written off when it crashed on takeoff from Taegu after being refuelled and rearmed there on 3 July 1951.

15

F-80C-10 49-737 of the 16th FIS/51st FIG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, July 1951

This aircraft had served with the 40th FBS in the lead up to the Korean War, and it was replaced by an F-51D in early July 1950 when the unit exchanged its Shooting Stars for Mustangs prior to being committed to frontline operations. Transferred to the 51st FIG's 16th FIS, 49-737 was shot down by a MiG-15 two miles northwest of Sonchon, near the Yalu River, at 2025 hrs on 7 July 1951 while being flown by 2Lt Francis E Johnson – he successfully ejected and was captured. 49-737 was one of 24 aircraft claimed shot down by Soviet pilots flying MiG-15s over North Korea in July 1951.

16

F-80C-10 49-811 of the 9th FBS/49th FBG, Taegu AB, South Korea, July 1951

Amongst the last F-80s assigned to the 9th FBS in the weeks leading up to its switch to the F-84E, 49-811 was routinely flown by 1Lt John S Starck in the early summer of 1951. This aircraft, which had served with the 16th FIS/51st FIG during the first months of the war, was transferred to the 36th FBS/8th FBG in August 1951. Having survived the conflict, 49-811 was written off in a mid-air collision with F-80C 49-757 near McClellan AFB, California, on 20 September 1957. Both jets were assigned to Air Force Logistics Command at the time of the accident.

17

F-80C-10 49-747 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Suwon AB, South Korea, August 1951

Marked up in the distinctive red trim of the 25th FIS, 49-747 was christened *LIN-DO-BEE II* (it was presumably a replacement for a previous F-80) by its unidentified pilot. The fighter was passed on to the 16th FIS – also part of the 51st FIG – during the early autumn of 1951, at which point its red trim was replaced by blue (see profile 15). On 15 October 1951, the jet was downed by AAA over enemy territory, its pilot, 1Lt Vernon L Wright, successfully ejecting. He was quickly retrieved by a USAF H-5G Dragon helicopter of the 3rd Air Rescue Squadron, but this also fell victim to AAA minutes after picking Wright up. A second H-5G from the same unit then managed to extricate both the F-80 pilot and his would-be rescuers. Wright, who destroyed a MiG-15 the following month after the 16th FIS had swapped its F-80Cs for F-86Es, was in turn shot down by a Soviet jet fighter on 15 January 1951 and spent the rest of the war as a PoW.

18

RF-80A-5 45-8443 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB, South Korea, August 1951

This aircraft was one of 25 RF-80As assigned to the 8th TRS in mid-1948 as replacements for RF-51Ds and RF-61Cs within the FEAF. Its first combat missions were flown from Itazuke, and the aircraft moved to Taegu with the 8th on 2 October 1950. On 25 February 1951, the 15th TRS was activated to replace the 8th TRS, and 45-8443 (one of the last RF-80As built by Lockheed) soldiered on with this unit through to war's end. It was eventually retired to the Arizona Aircraft Storage Squadron at Davis-Monthan AFB in September 1957 and sold for scrapping five months later.

19

F-80C-10 49-708 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, September 1951

Fitted with long-range 'Misawa' tip tanks, this aircraft was originally assigned to the 8th FBS/49th FBG prior to being transferred to the 80th FBS/8th FBG when the former transitioned to the F-84E in the summer of 1951. Its tenure with the 80th did not last long, however, for 49-708 was written off in a landing accident at Suwon on 30 September that same year – pilot 1Lt Joseph P Holmes sustained no injuries in the incident.

20

F-80C-10 49-656 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, October 1951

Also assigned to the 80th FBS in the autumn of 1951, 49-656 was routinely flown by Capt Hayward Anderson until it was lost in a fatal accident on 4 October 1951. The fighter-bomber, with Capt Donald W Akers at the controls, crashed into the sea inverted ten miles west of Pyeongtaek AB during a weapons training sortie. No trace of the pilot or 49-656 were found despite a search-and-rescue effort involving both aircraft and ships.

21

F-80C-10 49-564 of the 25th FIS/51st FIG, Suwon AB, Japan, October 1951

Like most F-80Cs flown by the 25th FIS, 49-564 sported a female name during the summer and autumn months of 1951 at Suwon. This aircraft was one of the last Shooting Stars assigned to the unit, the fighter-bomber being replaced by an F-86E in November 1951. 49-564's rear fuselage and tail had been riddled with automatic fire and the elevator for its port tailplane destroyed by a heavy-calibre AAA round when the jet pulled up from a dive-bombing run through a valley in North Korea during its final weeks of service. With the 25th FIS on the cusp of switching to the Sabre, it is possible that the aircraft was scrapped in situ at Suwon without being repaired, for there are no further unit listings for 49-564 following its service with the 51st FIG.

22

F-80C-5 47-560 of the 68th FIS/6160th ABW, Itazuke AB, Japan, early 1952

The 68th FIS was a Fighter All-Weather Squadron when it had claimed two of the first three aerial victories credited to UN fighter units in the Korean War. These kills had been achieved by pilots flying Twin Mustangs, and by the time this F-80C was assigned to the unit in early 1952, the 68th (which became an FIS on 25 April 1951) had all but replaced its F-82s with F-94 Starfires. Proudly adorned with the 68th's distinctive 'Lightning Lancers' emblem on its nose and squadron colours on the fuselage and Lockheed-built 165-gallon tip tanks, 47-560 was the sole Shooting Star allocated to the 68th. Maintained in pristine condition, unlike F-80s assigned the demanding fighter-bomber role in-theatre, this aircraft was used by Twin Mustang pilots to gain experience in flying a jet. The fighter also performed general 'hack' duties for the unit between Itazuke and Kimpo. 47-560 subsequently became one of 16 F-80Cs supplied to the Columbian air force in 1958, and it is believed to have remained operational through to 1966.

23

F-80C-10 49-649 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1952

Adorned with squadron colours on its tail and Fletcher tip tanks, and with the titling *IOWA'S LITTLE WILDROSE* in the same shade of yellow on its nose, 49-649 was routinely flown by Capt Sid Yahn during the winter of 1951-52. The fighter-bomber was written off in a crash-landing at Suwon on 23 March 1952.

24

F-80C-10 49-423 of the 8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, May 1952

Suitably marked with red, yellow and blue stripes on its tip tanks, fuselage and tail, and boasting the 8th FBG's crest on its nose, 49-423 was assigned to group CO Col Levi R Chase. A 12-victory ace from World War 2 (he was one of only three Allied pilots to shoot down aircraft from all three major Axis powers), Chase was recalled to active duty in April 1951 and served as deputy for operations with the F-86E-equipped 51st FIG prior to taking charge of the 8th FBG. Remaining in the USAF post-war, he commanded the F-4 Phantom II-equipped 12th Tactical Fighter Wing based at Cam Ranh Bay AB in South Vietnam in 1965-66. By the time his combat tour with the latter unit had ended, Chase had completed 512 missions. His F-80C, which had previously served with the 66th FIS/57th FIG at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, in 1950-51 before joining the 8th FBG as an attrition replacement, was subsequently transferred to the Brazilian air force in November 1957.

25

RF-80A-5 45-8421 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB, South Korea, September 1952

Christened *Betty Fay*, 45-8421 is depicted here with a mission tally totalling 75 sorties. Often flown by 1Lt Joseph Lanahan during the autumn of 1952, this aircraft became one of six RF-80As to be upgraded to RF-80C specification in 1953. 45-8421 was sent to the Arizona Aircraft Storage Squadron by the Arkansas Air National Guard's 154th TRS in October 1957, and it was sold for scrap in May of the following year.

26

F-80C-10 49-591 of the 80th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, October 1952

On 28 October 1952, the 8th FBG gained international attention when it logged its 50,000th combat sortie. The pilot who flew this milestone mission was 2Lt Warren R Guibor, who was at the controls of this aircraft, 49-591 – one of 36 F-80s from the group sent to bomb troop concentrations in and around the Wonsan area. When Guibor landed, it triggered one of the biggest celebrations of the war, his aircraft being hastily marked with a scroll containing the words *50,000 Sorties* immediately beneath its distinctive nose art. Passed on to the 18th FBG's 44th FBS (which remained at Clark AB providing local air defence for the duration of the Korean War) in late 1952, 49-591 crashed near Cabcaben, west of Manila, when it suffered engine failure on 2 January 1953.

27

F-80C-10 49-726 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, February 1953

Although devoid of nose art, 49-726 stood out on the Suwon ramp because it was one of the few F-80s to be adorned with a 'sharksmouth' during the Korean War. The jet was frequently flown by 1Lt Jack Taylor in the lead up to the 80th FBS's switch to the F-86F in May 1953, after which the aircraft was transferred to the 40th FIS/35th FIG at Komaki AB, Japan. 49-726 was amongst 33 F-80Cs supplied to the Brazilian air force in 1957-58.

28

F-80C-10 49-547 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1953

The distinctive artwork and titling on the nose of this aircraft was inspired by the *Li'l Abner* comic strip created by cartoonist Al Capp. *Li'l Abner* was hugely popular at this time, having 60 million readers in more than 900 American newspapers and 100 foreign papers in 28 countries. 'Evil Eye Fleagle' was a 'zoot suit-clad native of Brooklyn' whose evil eye could 'melt a battleship'. Amongst the last 70 F-80Cs left in Korea by the early spring of 1953, 49-547 was often flown by 1Lt Tom Owen. It was also supplied to Brazil in the late 1950s.

29

F-80C-10 49-689 of the 36th FBS/8th FBG, Suwon AB, South Korea, March 1953

Christened the *Creole Belle*, 49-689 was one of the last F-80Cs assigned to the 36th FBS at Suwon in early March 1953. The squadron had commenced its transition to the F-86F by the end of that same month.

30

RF-80A-5 45-8375 of the 15th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB, South Korea, May 1953

One of the more colourful RF-80As assigned to the 15th TRS, 45-8375 *BALL-O-FIRE* was frequently flown by 1Lt Gene Newman. This aircraft was also converted into an RF-80C immediately post-war, after which it was issued to the Tennessee Air National Guard's 105th TRS. The veteran jet was written off at the unit's Berry Field base on 21 July 1955.

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Front Cover
During May 1952, the 80th FBS of the 8th FBG was involved in targeting enemy flak emplacements that had been taking a heavy toll on USAF fighter-bombers. While completing 100 combat missions in-theatre, 1Lt Richard T 'Durk' Durkee flew a number of hair-raising flak suppression sorties against communist anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) sites. In the action depicted in this specially commissioned cover artwork by Gareth Hector, Durkee (flying F-80C-10 49-580, which was assigned to the group CO) and his wingman can be seen dropping napalm on gun emplacements along the side of a hill overlooking the target area in Suan County on 8 May 1952. The hill was then attacked twice more by other Shooting Stars from the 80th FBS.

The pilots involved in this hazardous operation had been woken at 0230 hrs at Suwon AB in order to attend the mission briefing, at which they were told their job was to bomb the AAA sites. 'We arrived at first light and immediately went into our bomb runs against the gun emplacements,' Durkee later recalled. 'Attacking in the semi-darkness, we could see the red glow of the projectiles as they came up to meet us. We were probably having the same amount of lead thrown up at us during daylight attacks, but in this light we could actually see the rounds – and that was scary. Our suppression wasn't a big success, for there was more flak coming up at us when we left the area than when we had arrived!' (*Cover artwork by Gareth Hector*)

Title Page
This impressive line-up shot of F-80Cs from the 8th FBG's 36th FBS was taken on the sprawling PSP flightline at Suwon AB just as the unit's jets were about to taxi out on yet another mission in the late summer of 1952. All of the aircraft appear to be loaded with 1000-lb general purpose bombs that would be used to make rail cuts in North Korea

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